ACA New South Wales

5 August 2026

The Hon Prue Car MP
NSW Deputy Premier and Minister for Education & Early Learning
Parliament of New South Wales
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Deputy Premier,

Re: Avoiding unintended consequences of the new Universal Preschool Funding program and Fee Relief for Long Day Care for 3,713 long daycare services across New South Wales

I trust you and your Ministerial team are all very well.

We refer to you your media release on 26 June 2026 (https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/minns-labor-government-continues-to-reshape-early-learning-sector-a-18-billion-investment).

While we can appreciate that details have not yet been published, there has been to date virtually no information provided as to what are the financial differences for long daycare services that currently are supported by NSW Start Strong (https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong-funding/start-strong-for-long-day-care).

It should be noted that since the *Universal Access* funding was first introduced in 2007, the *NSW Start Strong* funding was and to date the primary vehicle for the distribution of Commonwealth funding for eligible preschool children especially those enrolled across all of NSW's 3,700+ long daycare services.

And beginning in 2022, our advocacies to address the unfairness of NSW Start Strong funding was resolved by way of NSW long daycare services receiving an increase of up to 328%.

The current *Preschool Reform Agreement 2022-2027* (https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/preschool-reform-agreement) also largely continues to support the distribution of Commonwealth funding related to all preschool children. And ACA NSW appreciates the contributions of the previous and current NSW Government funding to NSW's long daycare services too.

It is worth noting that ACA NSW has been verbally assured by the NSW Department of Education that NSW's long daycare services' preschool funding will be very similar. Nevertheless, it remains worthwhile noting that since the introduction of the Commonwealth's Worker Retention Payments and the corresponding fee cap render all affected NSW long daycare services to be extremely fragile to any significant funding changes elsewhere.

Such fragility of most NSW's 3,700 long daycare services can oblige them to exit the Commonwealth's Worker Retention Payments arrangements, and instead significantly increase their fees to parents by as even as high as 25% or even higher just to achieve nett neutral financial sustainability.

Should you require any assistance or further information, we remain available to assist.

Yours sincerely,

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CEO

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encl Copy of NSW Department of Education's Start Strong funding

cc All members of the Parliament of New South Wales
All NSW members of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia
Mark Barraket, Deputy Secretary, NSW Department of Education
Kylie Crane, Deputy Secretary, Federal Department of Education

NSW Department of Education

Start Strong for Long Day Care

The Start Strong for Long Day Care program provides funding to deliver affordable, quality preschool education to children aged 3 and above who are enrolled in eligible long day care services in NSW. Funding is provided for children in the 2 years before school and incentivises enrolments of 600 hours per year. Evidence shows that this level of participation in a quality early childhood education program in the 2 years before school is associated with better outcomes for children.

Program guidelines

2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines

Providers must read the **2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines** on the department's website in full to understand and comply with the program.

Timing of payments has changed to quarterly payments

The timing of payments has changed in 2026. All four funding streams, 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment, 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment will be paid in four equal quarterly instalments:

1. Quarter 1 payments (January to March 2026) expected by 19 December 2025
2. Quarter 2 payments (April to June 2026) expected by 30 April 2026
3. Quarter 3 payments (July to September 2026) expected by 31 July 2026
4. Quarter 4 payments (October to December 2026) expected by 31 October 2026.

See **Section 8 Payment of funding in equal quarterly payments** for more information.

How to calculate fee relief and new Age Checker tool

Fee Relief Payment has changed in 2026.

The department provides up to $2,563 in Fee Relief Payment for children aged 4 and above and up to $769 for children aged 3 years old, enrolled at an eligible long day care service. Funding is calculated at the same rate for not-for-profit and for-profit services and as an annual flat rate allocation per enrolment for eligible children irrespective of the number of hours the child is enrolled per week.

In 2026, there will be two categories of Fee Relief Payment:

- Children eligible for the maximum fee relief rate can receive up to:
  - $2,563 per year for children aged 4 and above
  - $769 per year for children aged 3 years old
- All other children can receive up to:
  - $1,783 per year for children aged 4 and above
  - $423 per year for children aged 3 years old

A child is eligible for maximum funding if one of the following criteria is met:

1. All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, or
2. Children that attend a service:

- located in an Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote region in NSW based on 2021 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) produced by the University of Adelaide (Australian Centre for Housing Research) and used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, or
- located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 or 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021, or
- operated by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

See **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** of the 2026 program guidelines for fee relief funding rates.

Visit the **Calculating fee relief payments webpage** for case study examples of how to calculate and apply fee relief. You can also view a visual representation of each fee relief case study by downloading the **slide deck**.

A new **Age Checker tool (XLS 53 KB)** is available to help services understand how a child's date of birth determines what fee relief rate is applied for the whole calendar year under the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program.

2026 Fee relief declaration and consent form

The **Fee Relief Declaration and Consent form (PDF 386 KB)** is available for download.

One form must be completed for each child enrolled at your service. You cannot give fee relief for any child if you do not have a completed form.

Contacting your software provider

There are 2 different fee relief rates in 2026 for 4YO+ Fee Relief payments and 3YO Fee Relief Trial payments (one rate for children eligible for maximum funding, and another rate for all other children). Services will need to contact their software vendor to ensure that the software can support different fee relief rates.

Information videos

Video 1 - 2026 Fee relief funding updates (duration 37:24)

2026 Fee Relief Funding updates

Transcript

SPEAKER 1

Hello, everyone.

Thank you for viewing the 2026 Fee Relief Payment Informational Video. In this video, we will look at key changes to fee relief funding in 2026, including the two fee relief categories, how the fee relief amounts are calculated, and what happens with any remaining fee relief funds or unspent funds. We will also share some case study examples to help explain and understand these changes clearly.

Before we begin, I'd like to take a moment to honor the traditional custodians from the lands that you all join me from today. We recognise the Ongoing Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present as ongoing teachers of knowledge, songlines, and stories. We strive to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner in New South Wales achieves their potential through education. In the beginning long ago, at first and now and always, Aboriginal belonging to Country is eternal. May we continue to listen and work together to ensure First Nations children, and all children, can access culturally safe and high-quality education and care.

This video is organised into four easy sections to help you understand fee relief funding in the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care Program.

In section 1: 2026 Fee Relief Funding, we will cover an overview of fee relief, changes to fee relief funding in 2026, Fee Relief Payment rates, and fee relief spending rules.

In Section 2, we take you through three case study examples of how to apply fee relief.

In Section 3, we cover remaining fee relief and unspent funds, including an overview and a case study of remaining fee relief funds.

And, lastly, in Section 4, we provide answers to common fee relief questions and show you where you can find further information and resources.

With that overview in mind, let's move to the first section. Section 1 is about 2026 fee relief funding. Let's take a look at how you implement Fee Relief Payments.

First, the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment can only be given to families with eligible children who will be 4 years old on or before 31 July 2026. The 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment is for eligible children who will be 3 years old and not yet 4 years old on or before the 31 July in 2026. So this means the child's birth date must be on or between 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023.

Both the 4YO+ and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment must be used each week to reduce the family session or gap fees across the weeks the service operates and after Child Care Subsidy has been applied. Also, don't forget that you need families, carers, or guardians to sign a 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form for each eligible child before you can apply fee relief.

In 2026, you may need to apply different funding rates for different children. This means that you will need to ensure your software has the ability to apply the different funding rates in 2026. So what exactly do we mean when we say this? Well, your service may receive funding for both children eligible for maximum funding and for all other children.

For example, your service details may meet the fee relief criteria for all other children. However, you also have an Aboriginal child enrolled at your service, and they are entitled to the children eligible for maximum funding rate. To ensure that the correct fee relief rates are applied for each child, you will need to ensure that your software can apply both fee relief rates. If you are unsure of your provider and service details, please take a look at the 2026 initial funding allocation email sent to the provider.

In this email, we included provider and service profile details and outlined eligible funding rates to apply at each service. So what exactly has changed in 2026? Let's take a look at the next slide to find out. Some of the key changes to fee relief under the 2026 program include changes to Fee Relief Payment rates.

As you may be aware, we are making early childhood education and care more accessible and affordable by prioritising funding for low socio-economic regional and remote areas and increasing fee relief for families with the greatest need. This means there will be two fee relief rates available, and these are: children eligible for maximum funding, and all other children. We will explore fee relief rates later during the case study examples.

However, be sure to visit Section 7.5 in the 2026 Guidelines for more information about fee relief rates and calculations. In 2026, there are changes to unspent fee relief spending rules. In recognition of sector feedback concerning the additional administrative requirements of reserved, surplus, and unexpended funds concepts, the department has simplified the overall fee relief process. We have removed reserved, surplus, and unexpended fee relief funds terminology, and, from 2026, all unallocated or unspent fee relief funds will be considered remaining fee relief funds.

Furthermore, fee relief spending rules have changed to strengthen accountability and oversight of remaining fee relief expenditure with services no longer able to use surplus funds to reduce other children's fees at the service's discretion. Finally, a new age checker tool is available to help services understand how a child's date of birth determines what fee relief rate is applied for the whole 2026 calendar year. Building on what we just discussed, let's explore the two categories of fee relief funding rates. Fee Relief Payment rates have changed in 2026.

The department provides up to $2,563 in Fee Relief Payment for children aged 4 and above and up to $769 for children aged 3 years old enrolled at an eligible long day care service. Funding is calculated at the same rate for not-for-profit and for-profit services and calculated as an annual flat rate allocation per enrolment irrespective of the number of hours the child is enrolled per week. In 2026, there will be two categories of Fee Relief Payment. Children eligible for maximum funding can receive up to $2,563 per year for children aged 4 and above or $769 per year for children aged 3 years old.

All other children can receive up to $1,783 per year for children aged 4 and above or $423 per year for children aged 3 years old. Now let's explore what children may be eligible for the maximum funding rate. It's important to note here that a child is eligible for the maximum rate of fee relief funding if you answer yes to one of the criteria outlined. So children eligible for the maximum rate of fee relief are: all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children; children enrolled in a service located in an inner regional, outer regional, remote, or very remote region in New South Wales based on the 2021 Accessibility Remoteness Index of Australia, otherwise known as ARIA; children enrolled at a service located in a geographic area with a Socioeconomic Index For Areas decile, or a SEIFA decile, of 1 or 2. This uses the Statistical Area Level 2 ranking within New South Wales on the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage 2021.

Also, children enrolled at a service operated by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. Remember, for more information regarding fee relief rates and calculations, you can visit Section 7.5 of the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care Program Guidelines. In addition to the Guidelines, we have created a new Calculating Fee Relief Payments webpage to provide services with a case study example of how to calculate and apply fee relief. You can access this webpage through the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care landing page, and we will provide you with the landing page web link at the end of this video. These next points are crucial to understanding the bigger picture of fee relief. How do you spend fee relief in 2026? First, fee relief must be offered by the provider to the families of all children that meet the eligibility criteria as per the 2026 guidelines.

Fee relief spending rules apply to both the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment. Providers must consider the two categories of fee relief and apply the appropriate funding rate for each eligible child. For example, fee relief must be provided to children eligible for maximum funding at the rates outlined in Table 4 and fee relief provided to all other children at the rates outlined in Table 5 as per Section 7.5 of the 2026 Guidelines. Both the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment must be applied as a weekly reduction to a family's session fee or gap fee which is after the Child Care Subsidy has been applied and divided equally across the total service operating weeks for the calendar year.

We will explore examples of this rule in the next section. Finally, the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment cannot be used to provide fee relief for children aged 3 years old, and the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment cannot be used to provide fee relief for children aged 4 and above, with all fee relief payments to be correctly expended by the end of 2026. Now let's move from theory to practice. Let's explore some case study examples.

SPEAKER 2

Now let's take a look at some 2026 case studies on how to apply fee relief to families.

Case study 1 is an example of a 4-year-old child who is eligible to receive $2,563, which is the fee relief rate for children eligible for maximum funding. Let's explore this example further. In 2026, a family sends their child to a long day care preschool program with a daily session fee of $150. The child's birthdate is the 23 July 2021.

The service has a Socio-economic Index For Areas, also known as a SEIFA decile of 2. The family receives the Child Care Subsidy, and after applying the Child Care Subsidy, this leaves the family to pay a daily fee of $110. The child attends the service four days a week and has a total weekly fee of $440. The service operates for 49 weeks per year and does not charge any additional fees.

Step 1. Check the child's birthdate.

The child's birthdate is the 23 July 2021 which means the child is currently 4 years old turning 5 years old in 2026. Don't forget to use the age checker tool on the Start Strong for Long Day Care landing page also found in the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care Guidelines if you would like support in calculating a child's funding.

Step 2. Confirm that consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service.

Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form. You can find the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form in Section 12.1 of the 2026 Guidelines.

Step 3. Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 Guidelines.

When looking at the example information, we know that the service has a SEIFA. Case Study 2 is an example of a 3-year-old child who is eligible to receive $423, which is the 3-Year-Old fee relief for all other children. Let's explore this example further. In 2026, a family sends their child to a Long Day Care Preschool Program with a daily session fee of $120. The child's birth date is 7 June 2023. The service has a Socio-economic Index For Areas, also known as a SEIFA decile of 7. The family receives the Child Care Subsidy, and after applying the Child Care Subsidy, this leaves the family to pay a daily fee of $25. The child attends a service one day per week and has a total weekly fee of $25. The service operates for 49 weeks per year. However, this child commenced later in the year and attended the service for 30 weeks.

Step 1. Check the child's birthdate.

The child's birthdate is the 7 June 2023, and as per the age checker tool, the child is turning 3 years old. An additional way to check if a child is eligible for 3-Year-Old funding is to ensure their birthdate is between the 1 August 2022 and 1 July 2023.

Step 2. Confirm that consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service.

Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form in Section 12.1 of the 2026 Guidelines.

Step 3. Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 Guidelines.

So, when looking at the example information, we know that the service has a SEIFA decile of 7, and we have confirmed that the child is 3 years old. As per the criteria and funding rates table, this child is eligible to receive the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment annual flat rate for all other children of $423.

Step 4. This is where you calculate the weekly 3YO Fee Relief Payment.

Here you take the annual flat rate and divide it by the service's total operating weeks. So we take the $423 and divide that by 49 weeks which equals $8.63 of fee relief available to this family for 30 weeks that the child was enrolled.

Step 5. Now you calculate the weekly session fee or weekly invoice statement that the family will be charged.

For this example, we know that the family is charged $25 per day after the Child Care Subsidy has been applied. As the child attends a long day care service one day a week, we calculate this by taking $25 and multiplying that by 1, giving you the total amount of $25 that would be charged to the family per week.

Step 6. After you calculate the weekly session fee, you apply the weekly fee relief amount to reduce the family's fees.

For this example, you take the weekly session fee of $25 and take away the weekly fee relief eligible to that child, which we have already calculated as $8.63. So $25 - $8.63 = $16.37 This means that the family is left to pay $16.37 per week for the 30 weeks that that child was enrolled.

Case study 3 is an example of a 3-year-old child who is eligible to receive $769 which is the 3-Year-Old fee relief rate for children eligible for maximum funding. Let's explore this example further. In 2026, a family sends their child to a long day care preschool program with a daily session fee of $115. The child's birth date is the 1 April 2023. The service has a Socioeconomic Index For Areas, also known as a SEIFA decile of 8. The family does not receive the Child Care Subsidy, leaving the family to pay a daily fee of $115.

This child is Aboriginal and from the Dharug Nation. They attend the long day care service two days per week. The service operates for 50 weeks per year.

Step 1. Check the child's birthdate. The child's birthdate is the 1 April 2023, and as per the age checker tool, the child is turning 3 years old in 2026. As mentioned in Case Study 2, an additional way to check if a child is eligible for 3-Year-Old funding is to ensure that their birth date is between the 1 August 2022 and 31 July 2023.

Step 2. Now we need to confirm that the consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service. Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form found in Section 12.1 of the 2026 Guidelines.

Step 3. Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 Guidelines. So, when looking at this example, first we acknowledge that the child is Aboriginal and aged 3 years old and that the service has a SEIFA decile of 8. As per the criteria and funding rates table, this child is eligible to receive the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment annual flat rate for children eligible for maximum funding of $769.

Step 4. This is where you calculate the weekly 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment. Here you take the annual flat rate and divide it by the service's operating weeks. So we take $769 and divide that by 50 weeks which equals $15.38 of fee relief available to this family per week.

Step 5. Now let's calculate the weekly session fee or weekly invoice statement that the family will be charged. For this example, we know that the family is charged $115 per day. As the child attends a long day care service two days per week, we calculate this by taking $115 and multiplying that by 2, giving you the total amount of $230 that will be charged to the family per week. Step 6. After you calculate the weekly session fee, you now apply the weekly fee relief amount to reduce the family's fees.

For this example, you take the weekly session fee of $230 and take away the weekly fee relief eligible to that child, which we have already calculated as $15.38. So $230 - $15.38 = $214.62. This means that the family is left to pay $214.62 per week. Now that we've covered the basics, let's dive into the next key concept: Remaining Fee Relief Funds. The terminology Remaining Fee Relief Funds replaces the terms Reserved, Surplus, and Unexpended Funds. In 2026, providers are required to manage their fee relief funds based on the changing number of enrolments and family/carers who claim fee relief from their service. So what are remaining fee relief funds?

These are remaining funds when a service's enrolments are lower than the number of funded places. This can happen in situations such as: a child leaves a service creating a vacancy; a family chooses not to receive fee relief funds from the service; an enrolment is placed in vacant. These funds cannot be used until an additional eligible child nominates to receive fee relief from the service. The provider must retain these fee relief funds and may be required to return the funds to the department as unspent funds.

Additionally, remaining funds can occur when a family's gap fee has been reduced to 0 in a regular billing period. The provider may spend remaining fee relief funds to cover any additional charges imposed on the child eligible for funding such as levies and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each child. It is important to note that from 2026, services can no longer use remaining fee relief funds to reduce other children's fees at the service's discretion.

So what can you use with remaining fee relief funds? Remaining fee relief funds from the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment for the children eligible may be used to cover any shortfalls in the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding that the service is experiencing for other eligible children age 4 and above, and any remaining funds from the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment for the eligible children may be used to cover any additional shortfalls in the 3-Year-Old Fee Relief Trial Payment funding that the service is experiencing for other eligible 3-year-old children.

It is also important to note that each child can only receive the maximum fee relief amount applicable to them as per their eligible fee relief rate. For example, if a child is 4 years old, and they are eligible to receive the funding rate of $1,783, you can only apply $1,783 for that child during 2026. If there are 4YO+ Fee Relief and/or 3YO Fee Relief Trial

Payment funds remaining after covering additional charges imposed on the child and after covering any shortfalls in fee relief experienced by the service, these are unspent funds and may be needed to return to the department.

Building on what we just discussed, let's explore a remaining fee relief example. Case study 4 is an example of a four-year-old child who is eligible to receive $1,783 which is the 4YO+ Fee Relief rate for all other children. In 2026, a family sends their child to a long day care preschool program with a daily session fee of $137. The child's birthdate is 5 March 2022. The service has a Socio-economic Index For Areas, also known as a SEIFA decile of 9. The family receives the Child Care Subsidy, and after applying the Child Care Subsidy, this leaves the family to pay a daily fee of $26.45. The child attends a service one day a week and has a total weekly fee of $26.45. The service operates for 52 weeks per year.

Step 1. Check the child's birthdate. The child's birthdate is the 5 March 2022, and, as per the age checker tool, the child is turning 4 years old in 2026. An additional way to check if a child is eligible for 4YO+ funding is to ensure that the child's birthdate is on or before the 31 July 2022.

Step 2. We now need to confirm that consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service. Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration Consent Form found in Section 12.1 of the 2026 Guidelines.

Step 3. Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 Guidelines. When looking at this example, we know that the service has a SEIFA decile of 8 and that the child is turning 4 years old before the 31st of July, 2026. As per the criteria and funding rates table, the child is eligible to receive the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment annual flat rate for all other children of $1,783.

Step 4. This is where you calculate the weekly 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment. Here you take the annual flat rate and divide it by the service's total operating weeks. So we take $1,783 and divide that by 52 weeks which equals $34.29 of fee relief available to this family per week.

Step 5. Now let's calculate the weekly session fee or the weekly invoice statement that the family will be charged. For this example, we know that the family is charged $26.45 per day. As the child attends a long day care service one day a week, we calculate this by taking $26.45 and multiplying that by 1, giving you the total amount of $26.45 that will be charged to the family per week.

Step 6. After you calculate the weekly session fee, you now apply the weekly fee relief amount to reduce the family's fees. For this example, you take the weekly session fee of $26.45 and take away the weekly fee relief eligible to that child which we have already calculated as $34.29. So when you take the $26.45 and minus the $34.29 in the fee relief, this gives you a remaining fee relief amount of $7.84.

This means that the family has nothing to pay at the end of each week and that there is a $7.84 each week in remaining fee relief funds. After covering a shortfall in 4YO+ fee relief for all other eligible children and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each other's child, if there are any funds remaining from the $7.84, these are unspent funds, and they need to be returned to the department. If you would like further information about remaining fee relief funds, please visit Section 9.7 Remaining Fee Relief Funds in the 2026 Guidelines.

SPEAKER 3

Now that we've covered the essentials, for our final section, let's tackle some of the most common fee relief questions. Some questions the long day care team get asked are: "Can I use fee relief for one service "and apply to children enrolled in another service?" The answer is no.

If you are a provider with more than one service, you cannot transfer funding from one service to another. "I have too much fee relief. "Can I use this "on educational resources and staff salaries?" No. Fee relief cannot be used on program payment spending rules. Remaining fee relief payments and unspent funds may need to be returned to the department. Now let's take a look at some other questions that we frequently encounter. "What happens if a child starts later in the year?" That's a great question, and the answer is: Fee relief begins from the time of enrollment.

When a child starts later in the year, the fee relief is applied only for the weeks they are enrolled. The weekly fee reduction amount remains consistent, but it's only applied from the week the child's enrolment begins. "If I have too much 4YO+ fee relief funding, can I use this as 3YO fee relief instead? No. 4YO+ Fee Relief Payments cannot be used to provide 3YO fee relief and vice versa. Any leftover fee relief payments are remaining fee relief funds, and these may need to be returned to the department.

This leads us to some common questions about applying fee relief in 2026. "I have some children who are eligible "for the maximum fee relief funding "and some who are not. "How do I apply two different fee relief rates "in my software system?" Services will need to contact their software vendor to ensure that the software can support different fee relief rates. What exactly do we mean when we say this? Your service may have children enrolled that are eligible for the maximum funding amount of $2,583. In addition, you may have children that are eligible for the funding rate of $1,783.

You need to ensure that your software can support the different fee relief rates for both 3-year-old children and children aged 4 and above. Another question we commonly receive is, "How do we apply fee relief "for children attending less than 600 hours, "including occasional attendance?" Well, the number of hours or days enrolled does not change the calculation of an eligible child's fee relief weekly reduction. A child receives the same weekly fee relief amount if they are enrolled two days a week or one day a week.

The next questions we hear quite often. "Does the fee relief rate change "from 3YO to 4YO+ during the year at the child's birthday?" No. 3YO fee relief trial funding is applied as one annual flat rate starting from the date of enrolment up until 31 December 2026 for the whole calendar year. If eligible, the child will then receive 4YO+ fee relief from 1 January 2027, so you don't change funding rates when a child has their birthday. You keep applying the fee relief rate that the child is eligible for at the start of the year.

Remember, use the age checker tool to support you in calculating the child's age in 2026. "Can a family claim fee relief "from more than one service at a time?" No. A family cannot claim fee relief for the same child from more than one service at a time. If a child is enrolled in more than one service, the family must choose one service for fee relief. A family may change their nominated service at any time by completing a new Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form. "Can I pass on fee relief if I don't have "a signed 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form?" No. You cannot give a child fee relief unless the family has completed a new 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form.

For example, a parent cannot sign a 2025 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form and receive 2026 fee relief funding. To receive fee relief funding in 2026, as noted, the family or carer must sign a 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form.

"What is the process if I don't think that I have enough "4YO+ Fee Relief Payment allocated to my service for 2026?" If your service is experiencing a shortfall in 4YO+ fee relief, you can use the 4YO+ program payment funds as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible children. The 2026 Fee Relief Payment Adjustment Process will open from 29 January 2027, where services will be able to submit data of their correctly expended 2026 Fee Relief Payments and apply for a fee relief adjustment. "Is a child identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander eligible for maximum fee relief if my service is in a major city?" Yes. The location of a service does not impact the eligibility for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child.

All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children are eligible for the maximum fee relief rate. "Are school-aged children under 6 years old enrolled in an LDC in January 2026, eligible for 4YO+ fee relief prior to commencing primary school?" Yes. An enrolled child who is not yet in school is eligible for funding in 2026. Complete a 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form. Once this child leaves the service to attend school, the fee relief allocated to them is considered remaining funds. That brings us to the end of our fee relief video.

Thank you for taking the time to watch this. We hope this video was helpful, and please know that we are grateful for your continued support in providing affordable quality preschool education to childrens age three and above.

Please don't forget to visit us on our Start Strong for Long Day Care landing page where you can access the 2026 Guidelines and other useful resources and information.

Alternatively, if you have any questions or feedback, please don't hesitate to email the Long Day Care Funding team at ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au Have a wonderful day and thank you.

[End transcript]

Video 2 - 2026 Program guidelines (duration 54.14)

Learn about the changes to Start Strong Long Day Care 2026 program guidelines.

Transcript

Natalie: We will. We'll kick off in a few moments, just giving a little bit of time for others to join.

If you'd like to have a go at the Q&A function and enter the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country in which you are joining us, you're welcome to do so.

I can see the numbers ticking up, so we might get started.

Thank you for joining us today, for coming along to the Start Strong for Long Day Care program webinar.

My name is Natalie McCall and I'm the Director of Sector Programs.

This session is to provide you with an overview of the 2026 program and to answer some of the common questions we've received, including through the registration process.

I want to begin by acknowledging that I am hosting this session from the lands of the Dharug People.

I acknowledge the ongoing custodians of the various lands on which you're joining today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, Islander people participating in this session.

At the Department of Education we pay respects to Elders past and present as ongoing teachers of knowledge, song lines and stories.

We strive to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner in NSW achieves their potential through education, and I'm proud that Start Strong prioritises First Nations children and facilitates their access to quality preschool education.

Some housekeeping matters before we get into the content. This session is scheduled to run for 60 minutes. It is being recorded and will be posted on the web page and distributed to all attendees. Microphones and cameras are turned off because there's so many of us.

We would like you to watch and listen the webinar.

So we're holding, we, while the question and answer function at the top of your screen will be working and you can post questions there.

I've asked the moderators to hold off responding to questions until we reach the question and answer component at the end of the webinar so that you're not distracted by the question and answer in the chat.

You'll find that most of your questions will be answered during this webinar.

And of course, this is not your only opportunity to ask questions.

We won't be discussing individual service questions today, but please email us directly if you have questions about funding for your particular service.

We are presenting slides right now, so if you cannot see the slides, please comment in the question and answer function and we'll reissue the help instructions there.

At the end of today's webinar, there'll be a short optional survey for you to provide your feedback. Your participation in the webinar and feedback are really important to us. They help us to improve the advice and the support that we provide to you. So thanks so much for being here.

What are we talking about today?

Today's session is organised into 5 parts.

We'll start with an overview of the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program, including the key changes for next year.

Then we'll talk about program payments and fee relief funding for 2026.

After that, we'll cover how to get ready for the changes coming next year.

Finally, we'll finish with a question and answer session.

You will find that most of your questions will be answered during the session, but the moderators will respond to any questions that you've posted during the webinar, and if so, that you can focus on the webinar itself.

Let's make a start.

In this first section, we'll focus on the changes to the Start Strong for Long Day Care program in 2026.

What's changing and why?

The 2026 Start Strong program was announced on 30th of October 2025.

The NSW Government has confirmed the funding rates, eligibility criteria and spending rules for the 2026 program, all of which are laid out in the Program Guidelines available online.

I trust you've had time to review the Program Guidelines and your Provider and Service Profile letter, which was sent to you via email on the 5th of November.

Start Strong's objectives are on the screen and the 2026 program reflects these 4 key areas.

Start Strong provides funding to improve affordability of preschool education, to support quality uplift in preschool education, to drive improved outcomes for all children and to incentivise increased enrolment and attendance in quality preschool programs in the 2 years before school.

In 2026, the program continues funding to support the accessibility and affordability of quality preschool.

The program's architecture continues, it supports long day care services through program payments and it supports families through fee relief.

Support also continues for the same age group for 3-year-old children until school age.

The scale of Start Strong changing has not changed.

Both program funding and fee relief funding has been indexed.

In 2025, the total value of the Long Day Care program was between approximately 340 million and 370 million.

In 2026 this has increased to between approximately 350 million and 380 million.

So what has changed?

While the scale of funding and the families and services supported by Start Strong are not changing in 2026, we are directing more of the funds to the children who need it most.

The NSW Government has made some changes to ensure funding is directed towards safe, quality services and to help early childhood education and care be more affordable for the families who need it most.

The government is driving improvements to safety, quality and equity in early childhood education and care so that every child in NSW can thrive.

Our Start Strong programs are changing to help achieve this.

In relation to quality, program changes have been made to support an uplifting quality across the sector.

For example, we've made clear that in the program payments can be used for activities which support enhanced quality, including professional development.

Also, services that receive Start Strong Program funding and do not meet the national quality standard, may be directed to participate in quality improvement programs to lift their rating and the department may withhold funding from services that consistently do not meet the rating.

There are changes in how we allocate program payments and fee relief.

We're making quality early childhood education and care more accessible by prioritising funding to low income areas and increasing fee relief for families with the greatest need.

For example, fee relief payments will increase for children eligible for maximum funding, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children attending a service in a regional or remote area, or children attending a service in an area of relative socio-economic disadvantage.

The team will speak to this in further detail shortly.

We've also made some clarifications and simplifications.

The department has simplified fee relief responsibilities by revising the reserved fee relief terminology.

There's now clear terminology for fee relief management.

Fee relief funds are not currently being applied, that are not currently being applied to a child's enrolment fees, will not be considered remaining fee relief funds and at the end of the year, any remaining fee relief funds become unspent funds and maybe need to be returned to the department.

We're also making a change so that payments will now be made in 4 equal quarterly instalments.

Those are some of the high level changes and we'll go into a little bit more detail now.

Let me hand over to Emma Isaacson, the Senior Project Officer in the Long Day Care Funding team to explain program payment funding.

Emma: Thanks Nat, and thank you everyone for joining.

My name is Emma and I'm a Senior Programs Officer in the Long Day Care Funding team.

Today I'll be taking you through program payment funding.

In Section 2 we will talk about the 2026 program payment funding and the key changes including important updates for both not-for-profit and for-profit services, the provider profile and service profile letter emailed to providers at the beginning of November and how program payment funding will be calculated.

We'll also cover the new spending rules and what happens with any unspent program payment funds.

In 2026, the key changes to program payment funding include prioritising funding to services located in low socio-economic areas and making a distinction between funding rates for not-for-profit and for-profit providers.

We will explore the program payment funding rates in the next 2 slides for both not-for-profit and for-profit providers.

As mentioned, in 2026, the program payment funding rates and calculations are different for not-for-profit providers and for-profit providers.

In this table you will see the 2026 program payment funding rates for for-profit providers.

You will notice that there are 2 distinct tables with the first table showing funding rates for services located in low socio-economic areas, SEIFA deciles one to 5, and the second table for services located in SEIFA deciles 6 to 10.

If you are a for-profit provider of a service with a SEIFA decile between one and five, you may be eligible to receive up to $1,092 per enrolment, depending on the age of the child and the number of hours enrolled.

You may also be eligible to receive up to $546 per equity enrolment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, or if your service is located in SEIFA decile one or two.

These funding rates are also dependent on child age and number of hours enrolled.

If you are a for-profit provider of a service with a SEIFA decile between 6 and 10, you may be eligible to receive up to $546 per enrolment, depending on the age of the child and the number of hours enrolled.

You may also be eligible to receive up to $273 per equity enrolment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children also dependent on the age.

In 2026, as mentioned, funding is being directed to not-for-profit providers and children attending services located in low socio-economic areas. All not-for-profit providers regardless of their service's

SEIFA decile, may be eligible to receive up to $1,092 per enrolment, depending on the age of the child and the number of hours enrolled.

Not-for-profit providers may also be eligible to receive up to $546 per equity enrolment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, or if the service is located in SEIFA decile one or two.

These funding rates are also dependent on the age of the child and number of hours enrolled.

If you would like more information regarding program payment funding rates and calculations, please visit Section 7.3 and 7.4 in the 2026 Guidelines.

We understand these changes can be overwhelming and you might be wondering what type of provider entity type you are or what SEIFA decile your service has.

To assist you with this information, the department emailed providers a Provider Profile and Service Profile letter, which we will explore in the next slide.

The department sent long day care providers a Provider Profile and Service Profile letter via email on the 5th and 6th of November.

The email was sent to support providers in understanding their provider and service profile and potential funding rates that you may be eligible for in 2026.

The letter included provider level information including provider name, provider approval ID, not-for-profit or for-profit entity type, and whether the provider is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

The letter also included service level information such as service name, service approval ID, SEIFA decile and ARIA classification.

It is important to note that the department does not determine SEIFA deciles or ARIA classification.

This information is provided by the Australian Government and cannot be disputed.

Additionally, your provider type, for-profit and not-for-profit status has been confirmed against data from NQAITS, ECCMS and the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

If you have any concerns about the information in the Provider Profile and Service Profile letter, please contact the department via email at ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au.

Now that we have discussed program payment funding rates, let's take a look at program payment spending rules in 2026.

4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to pay salary and wages for early childhood teachers and educators to deliver a quality early childhood education program and purchase functional or educational resources or equipment.

For the full list of spending rules and examples, see Section 9.1 of the guidelines.

Now that we have discussed program payment funding, let's move into fee relief funding in 2026.

Jess: Thanks Em.

Kaya, hello everyone, my name is Jess and I'm a proud Minang Koreng woman and Senior Programs officer in the Long Day Care Funding team.

Today I will take you through fee relief funding in 2026.

In Section 3, we will focus on key changes to fee relief funding, including the 2 fee relief categories, how the fee relief amounts are calculated, and what happens with any remaining fee relief funds or unspent funds.

We will also share some case study examples to help explain and understand these changes clearly.

Let's take a look at how you implement fee relief payments.

First, the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payments can only be given to families with eligible children who will be 4-years-old on or before the 31th of July 2026.

The 3YO Fee Relief trial payment is for eligible children who will be 3-years-old and not yet 4-years-old on or before the 31th thof July in 2026.

So this means the child's birth date must be on or between the 1st of August 2022 to 31st of July 2023.

Both the 4YO+ and 3YO Fee Relief Trial must be used each week to reduce the family session or gap fees across the weeks the service operates and after the Child Care Subsidy has been applied.

Also, don't forget that you need families, carers or guardians to sign a 2026 Fee relief declaration and consent form for each eligible child before you can apply fee relief.

We will explore specific fee relief examples using 2 case studies later in this session.

In 2026, you may need to apply different funding rates for different children.

This means that you will need to ensure your software has the ability to apply the different funding rates in 2026.

So what exactly do we mean when we say this?

Well, your service may receive funding for both children eligible for maximum funding and for all other children.

For example, your service details may meet the fee relief criteria for all other children.

However, you also have an Aboriginal child enrolled at your service and they are entitled to the children eligible for maximum funding rate.

To ensure that the correct fee relief rates are applied for each child, you will need to ensure your software can apply both fee relief categories.

So what exactly has changed in 2026?

Let's take a look at the next slide to find out.

Some of the key changes to fee relief under the 2026 Program include changes to the fee relief payment rates.

As you may be aware, we are making early childhood education and care more accessible and affordable by prioritising funding for low socio-economic, regional and remote areas and increasing fee relief for families with the greatest need.

This means there will be two fee relief categories available and these are children eligible for maximum funding and all other children.

We will explore fee relief rates later during the case study examples.

However, be sure to visit Section 7.5 in the 2026 guidelines for more information about fee relief rates and calculations.

Also, in recognition of sector feedback concerning the administrational requirements of reserved, surplus and unexpended funds concepts, the department has simplified the overall fee relief process by removing reserved, surplus and unexpended fee relief funds terminology and from 2026, all unallocated or unspent fee relief funds will be considered remaining fee relief funds.

Furthermore, the fee relief spending rules have changed to strengthen accountability and oversight of remaining fee relief expenditure, with services no longer able to use surplus funds to reduce other children's fees at the service's discretion.

Finally, a new age checker tool is available to help services understand how a child's date of birth determines what fee relief rate is applied for the whole calendar year under the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care Program.

Building on what we just discussed, let's explore the 2 categories of fee relief funding rates.

In 2026, there will be 2 categories of fee relief payment.

Children eligible for the maximum fee relief rate can receive up to $2,563 per year for children aged 4 and above and $769 per year for children aged 3-years-old.

All other children can receive up to $1,783 per year for children aged 4 and above, and $423 per year for children aged 3-years-old.

Now let's explore what children may be eligible for the maximum funding rate.

It is important to note here that a child is eligible for the maximum rate of fee relief funding if you answer yes to one of the criteria outlined.

Children eligible for the maximum rate of fee relief are.

All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children.

In addition, children are eligible for the maximum fee relief funding rate if a service is located in an inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote region in NSW or located in a geographic area with a SEIFA decile of one or two.

Also, if the service is operated by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

And remember, for more information regarding fee relief rates and calculations, you can visit Section 7.5 of the 2026 guidelines.

In addition to the guidelines, we have created a new Calculating Fee Relief Payments web page to provide services with case study examples of how to calculate and apply fee relief.

You can access this web page through the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care web page.

Fee Relief Payment spending rules.

These next points are crucial to understanding the bigger picture of fee relief.

How do you spend fee relief in 2026?

First, fee relief must be offered by the provider to the families of all children that meet the eligibility criteria as per the 2026 guidelines, with the fee relief spending rules applying to both the 4YO + Fee Relief Payment and the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment.

Providers must consider the 2 categories of fee relief and apply the appropriate funding rates for each eligible child.

For example, fee relief must be provided to children eligible for maximum funding at the rates outline in table 4, with fee relief provided to other children at the rates outline in table 5 as per Section 7.5 of the 2026 guidelines. Both the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment must be applied as a weekly reduction to a family session fee or GAP fee, which is after the childcare subsidy has been applied and divided equally across the total service operating weeks for the calendar year.

We will explore examples of this rule in the next section.

Finally, the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment cannot be used to provide fee relief for children aged 3-years-old, and the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment cannot be used to provide fee relief for children aged 4 and above, with all fee relief payments to be correctly expended by the end of 2026.

Now let's move from theory to practise and explore a case study example.

How to calculate fee relief: Case Study One. Case Study One is an example of a 3-year-old child who is eligible to receive $769, which is the 3-year-old fee relief rate for children eligible for maximum funding.

Let's explore this example further. In 2026, a family sends their child to a long day care preschool program with a daily session fee of $115.

The child's birth date is the 1st of April 2023.

The service has a SEIFA decile of 8.

The family does not receive child care subsidy, leaving the family to pay a daily fee of $115.

This child is Aboriginal and from the Dharug Nation.

They attend the long day care service 2 days per week and the service operates for 50 weeks per year.

Now let's go through the steps in how you would calculate their fee relief.

Step one, check the child's birth date.

The child's birth date is the 1st of April 2023 and as per the Age Checker Tool, the child is turning 3-years-old in 2026.

Additionally, another way to check if a child is eligible for 3-year-old funding is to ensure that their birth date is between the 1st of August 2022 and the 31st of July 2023.

Step two.

We now need to confirm that consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service.

Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee relief declaration and consent form.

You can find this in Section 12.1 of the 2026 guidelines.

Step three.

Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 guidelines.

So when looking at this example, first we acknowledge that the child is Aboriginal and aged 3-years-old and that the service has a SEIFA decile of 8.

As per the criteria and funding rates table, this child is eligible to receive the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment annual flat rate for children eligible for maximum funding of $769.

Step four.

This is where you calculate the weekly 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment.

Here you take the annual flat rate and divide it by the services total operating weeks.

We take $769 and divide that by 50 weeks, which equals $15.38 of fee relief available to this family, per week.

Step five.

Now let's calculate the weekly session fee or weekly invoice statement that the family will be charged.

For this example, we know that the family is charged $115 per day as the child attends the long day care service 2 days per week.

We calculate this by taking 115 and multiplying that by 2, giving you the total amount of $230 that will be charged to the family, per week.

Step six.

After you calculate the weekly session fee, you now apply the weekly fee relief amount to reduce the family's fees.

For this example, you take the weekly session fees of $230 and take away the weekly fee relief eligible to that child, which we have already calculated as $15.38.

So $230 - $15.38 = $214.62

This means that the family is left to pay $214.62 per week.

Now that we have discussed the funding rates, spending rules and a case study, let's explore another key change for fee relief in 2026.

The terminology and process of remaining fee relief funds.

The terminology, 'remaining fee relief funds', replace the terms 'reserved', 'surplus' and 'unexpended funds'.

In 2026, providers are required to manage their fee relief funds based on the changing number of enrolments and families who claim fee relief from their service.

So what are remaining fee relief funds?

Funds are remaining funds when a service's enrolments are lower than the number of funded places.

This can happen in situations such as: a child leaves the service creating a vacancy, a family chooses not to receive fee relief from the service, and an enrolment place is vacant.

These funds cannot be used until an additional eligible child nominates to receive fee relief from the service.

The provider must retain these fee relief funds and may be required to return funds to the department as unspent funds.

Additionally, remaining funds can occur when a family's gap fees have been reduced to zero in a regular billing period.

The provider may spend remaining fee relief funds to cover any additional charges imposed on the eligible child, such as levies and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each other child.

It is important to note that from 2026, services can no longer use remaining fee relief funds to reduce other children's fees at the services discretion.

So what can you do with remaining fee relief funds?

Remaining fee relief funds from the 4YO + Fee Relief Payment for the eligible child may be used to cover any shortfall in 4YO + Fee Relief Payment funding that the service is experiencing for other eligible children aged 4 and above.

And any remaining funds from the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment for the eligible child may be used to cover any shortfall in 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding that the service is experiencing for other eligible 3-year-old children.

It is also important to note that each eligible child can only receive the maximum fee relief amount applicable to them as per their eligible fee relief rate.

For example, if a child is 4-years-old and they are eligible to receive the funding rate of $1,783, you can only apply $1,783 for that child during 2026.

If there are 4YO+ Fee Relief and/or 3YO Fee Relief Trial funds remaining after covering additional charges imposed on the child and after covering any shortfall in fee relief experienced by the service, these are unspent funds and may need to be returned to the department.

Building on what we just discussed, let's explore a remaining fee relief example.

Remaining Fee Relief Funds Example: Case Study two. Case study two is an example of a 4-year-old child who is eligible to receive $1,783, which is the 4YO+ Fee Relief rate for all other children.

Let's explore this example further.

In 2026, a family sends their child to a long day care preschool program with a daily session fee of $137.

The child's birth date is the 5th of March 2022.

The service has a SEIFA decile of 9.

The family receives the childcare subsidy and after applying the childcare subsidy, this leaves the family to pay a daily fee of $26.45

The child attends the service one day a week and has a total weekly fee of $26.45

The service operates for 52 weeks per year.

Now let's go through the steps in how to calculate their fee relief.

Step one, check the child's birth date.

The child's birth date is the 5th of March 2022 and as per the Age Checker Tool, the child is turning 4-years-old in 2026.

An additional way to check if a child is eligible for the 4YO+ funding is to ensure that the child's birth date is on or before the 31st of July 2022.

Step two.

We now need to confirm that consent has been given from the family for the child to receive fee relief at your service.

Consent is obtained when the family correctly completes and signs the 2026 Fee Relief Declaration and Consent Form found in Section 12.1 of the 2026 guidelines.

Step three: Check the fee relief rate that the child is eligible to receive as per the funding rates in Section 7.5 of the 2026 guidelines.

When looking at this example, we know the service has a SEIFA decile of 9 and that the child is turning 4-years-old before the 31st of July 2026.

As per the criteria and funding rates, this child is eligible to receive the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, annual flat rate for all other children of $1,783

Step four.

This is where you calculate the weekly 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment.

Here you take the annual flat rate and divide it by the services total operating weeks.

So we take $1,783 and divide that by 52 weeks, which equals $34.29 of fee relief available to this family, per week.

Step five.

Now let's calculate the weekly session fee or weekly invoice statement that the family will be charged.

For this example, we know that the family is charged $26.45 per day. As the child attends the long day care service one day a week, we calculate this by taking $26.45 and multiplying that by one, giving you the total amount of $26.45 that the will be charged to the family, per week.

Step six.

After you calculate the weekly session fee, you now apply the weekly fee relief amount to reduce the family's fees.

For this example, you take the weekly session fee of $26.45 and take away the weekly fee relief eligible to that child, which we have already calculated as $34.29

So when you take the $26.45 and minus the $34.29 in fee relief, this gives you a remaining fee relief amount of $7.84

This means that the family has nothing to pay at the end of each week and that there is $7.84 each week in remaining fee relief funds. After covering a shortfall in 4YO+, Fee Relief for other eligible children and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each other child, if there are any remaining funds from the $7.84, these are unspent funds, and they may need to be returned to the department.

If you would like further information about remaining fee relief funds, please visit Section 9.7 of the 2026 guidelines.

Now that we have discussed fee relief, let's look at how to prepare for 2026.

Georgia: Thanks Jess.

Hi everyone, My name is Georgia and I'm a Programs Officer in the Long Day Care Funding team.

As we get ready for 2026, there are some key things to keep in mind.

Over the next few slides, we will discuss some key dates and go through a handy checklist to assist you in preparing for a great year ahead.

Let's take a moment to walk through some important dates to keep in mind as we prepare for the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program.

First up, on the 30th of October 2025, the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care guidelines were released.

This will give you all the essential information and updates you need for the upcoming year.

On the same day, the 2026 Declaration and Consent Form also became available, so you can now access and complete these forms.

On the 24th of November 2025, the 2026 Terms and Conditions were released in ECCMS.

Acceptance is due by the 7th of December to receive quarter one payments in December 2025.

On the 8th of December 2025, the initial funding allocation letters will be sent to the approved provider primary contact email address.

This letter will outline the funding amounts for 2026 based on the 2025 June CCS data provided by the Australian Government.

Finally, from the 10th of December 2025, the process for quarter one payments will begin.

This means all preparation should be in place to ensure smooth payments for the first quarter of 2026.

Make sure to mark these dates in your calendar and reach out if you have any questions.

Together, we'll have a successful start to the new program year.

Now that we've gone through the key dates, let's talk about another important part of the Start Strong program, the Fee relief declaration and consent form.

This form is essential for accurate reporting and data collection and helps us determine whether a child is enrolled at another service and where the family will be claiming fee relief.

It is important for services to arrange for families and staff to complete these forms each year.

Families must return completed forms to be eligible for fee relief.

Please remember, fee relief cannot be provided if consent has hasn't been given.

The form and resources you'll need are available on the department's websites.

The 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines, the Start Strong for Long Day Care landing page, Start Strong Family page, and the Calculating Fee Relief Payment page.

And don't forget, our Start Strong Family web page includes flyers and templates to help you communicate with families about the fee relief process, explaining what's required and why these forms matter.

If you have any questions or need support, those resources are a great place to start.

We have listened to your feedback and have updated the declaration and consent form to make it clearer and easier for all families to understand.

Our new family friendly design includes artworks created by a Minang and Koreng artist, reflecting our commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and creating a welcoming and approachable form for everybody.

Next, let's go over a quick but very important checklist to make sure you have all your details in ECCMS up to date.

First, check that your ECCMS login is working correctly.

This is your gateway to all the important information and forms required.

Then review and update your SP Admin and SP user details in ECCMS to make sure the right people have access.

Don't forget to check and update your phone number and email address on the ECCMS main page so we can easily reach you if needed.

It is also important to double check your contact details to ensure we have the most current information.

Make sure your bank details are accurate and up to date to avoid any delays in payments.

Finally, confirm the email address where the remittance and payment advice is to be sent.

This helps ensure you receive all payment notifications properly.

In 2026, there will be two different fee relief rates to be aware of, one for four years old and up and another for 3-years-old fee relief trial payments.

Each of these have 2 rates, one for children eligible for maximum funding and another for all other children.

Because of this, it is really important that your service gets in touch with your software vendor to make sure your systems can handle these different rates smoothly.

This will help make sure everything runs without a hitch, and when it comes to processing fee relief payments. As previously mentioned, all 4 funding streams, 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment, 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment will be paid in 4 quarterly instalments.

Quarter 1 payments, which capture January to March 2026, are expected by the 19th of December 2025.

Quarter 2 payments, which capture April to June 2026, are expected by the 30th of April 2026.

Quarter 3 payments, which capture July to September 2026, are expected by the 31st of July 2026 and Quarter 4 payments, which capture October to December 2026, are expected by the 31st of October 2026.

Here is a simple checklist to help you get ready for 2026 funding.

Step one.

Read and sign the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care guidelines.

Step two.

Make sure families and staff have read and completed the 2026 declaration and consent form.

Step three.

Contact your software vendor to check that your system can handle different fee relief funding rates and Step four, review and update your ECCMS login details, contact information and bank account details.

Following these steps will help you be prepared and ready for the changes ahead.

Natalie: Thanks Georgia.

Great short checklist there at the end with some good tips to get ready for 2026.

So that brings us to the question and answer session of the webinar.

If you have questions, please use the Q&A chat function to submit them.

But first we'll answer some of the questions that were pre-registered with us.

I'll answer the first 2 questions and then Jess and Emma will take you through the other questions or as much time we have with as much time we have today.

So our first set of questions were about the initial funding allocation letters.

The question we received was: when will the 2026 initial funding allocation letters be sent?

And the answer is we're trying to get to the these letters to you as soon as possible.

At the moment we are planning to have letters out between the 8th and the 12th of December.

The letter will confirm your annual allocation for each service and will explain the basis upon which that funding has been has been allocated.

Which includes the ARIA rating of the service indicating level of remoteness of the area in which the service is located, the SEIFA for decile which indicates the level of relative socio-economic advantage of the area in which the service was located, and the profit or not-for-profit status of the provider.

Another question we received was whether services can change the region or area of relative socio-economic advantage, that is the ARIA ratings and SEIFA deciles of their service.

No, we can't change these.

The SEIFA and ARIA ratings are not determined by the Department of Education and cannot be varied.

They're based on the location of your service.

Jess: Thanks, Nat.

I hope everyone's found this webinar informative so far and Emma and I will now go through some more questions.

So these questions in particular are informative for families.

Our first question is: will you have a letter and a family flyer for families?

Emma: Thanks, Jess.

And yes, the template letter to give to families about relief at your service and the family flyer are now available on the department's website.

For further information you can go to the Start Strong for Families webpage.

Jess: Thanks Em.

Another great question for families are, are school aged children under 6 years enrolled in January 2026 prior to commencing primary school, eligible for 4-year-old fee relief?

Emma: Yes, an enrolled child who is not yet in school is eligible for funding in 2026.

They need to complete a 2026 declaration and consent form and then once this child leaves the service to attend school, the fee relief allocated to them is considered remaining funds.

Jess: Thanks Em.

We have some more great questions and some common questions that we get asked are: can I use fee relief from one service and apply it to children enrolled in another service?

Emma: The answer to that one is no.

If you are a provider with more than one service, you cannot transfer funding from one service to another.

Jess: Another question, I have too much fee relief.

Can I use this on educational resources and staff salaries?

Emma: No, fee relief cannot be used on program payment spending rules.

Remaining fee relief payments and unspent funds may need to be returned to the department.

Let's take a look at some other questions we frequently encounter on the next slide.

Jess: What happens if a child starts later in the year?

Emma: That's a great question, and the answer is fee relief begins from the time of enrolment.

When a child starts later in the year, the fee relief is applied only for the weeks they are enrolled.

The weekly fee reduction amount remains consistent but it's only applied from the week the child enrolment starts.

Jess: Thanks Em.

Another question that we commonly get asked is: if I have too much 4-year-old fee relief funding, can I use this as 3-year-old fee relief trial instead?

Emma: And the answer to that question is No. 4YO+ Fee Relief payments cannot be used to provide 3YO fee relief and vice versa.

Any leftover fee relief payments are considered remaining fee relief funds and these may need to be returned to the department.

Jess: This leads us to some more common questions about applying fee relief in 2026.

I have some children who are eligible for maximum fee relief funding and some who are not.

How do I apply 2 different fee relief rates in my software system?

Emma: Services will need to contact their software vendor to ensure that their software can support the different fee relief rates.

What exactly do we mean when we say this?

Your service may have children enrolled that are eligible for maximum funding amount of $2,583.

In addition, you may also have children who are eligible for the funding rate of $1,783.

You will need to ensure that your software can support the different fee relief rates for both 3YO children and children aged 4 and above.

Jess: Thanks Em.

Another question, how do we apply fee relief for children attending less than 600 hours including occasional attendance?

Emma: Great question.

Well, the number of hours or days enrolled does not change the calculation of an eligible child's weekly fee relief reduction.

A child receives the same weekly fee relief amount if they are enrolled for 2 days a week or for one day a week.

Jess: Thanks Em.

We've received some really great questions here and these next questions we hear quite often.

Does the fee relief rate change from 3-year-old to 4-year-old during the year at the child's birthday?

Emma: Is a great question. The answer to that one is no.

3YO Fee Relief Trial funding is applied as one annual flat rate starting from the date of enrolment up until the 31st of December 2026, for the whole calendar year.

If eligible, the child will then receive 4YO+ Fee Relief from the 1st of January 2027.

So you don't change the funding rates when a child has their birthday, you keep applying the fee relief rate that the child is eligible for at the start of the year.

Remember to use the Age Checker Tool to support you in calculating the child's age in 2026.

Jess: Thanks Em.

I think that's a great tip is using the Age Checker Tool which you can find on our Start Strong web page.

Also, another question: can a family change the service they want to get fee relief from?

Emma: Yes, they can.

A family may change their nominated service at any time.

At each service where their child is enrolled, the parent, carer or guardian must complete a new 2026 declaration and consent form to change to confirm their change in their nominated service.

Hopefully, that's cleared up a couple of key questions that we receive.

Let's move on now to our final 2 questions.

Jess: Thanks Em. And this one's about Declaration and Consent Forms.

So can I pass on fee relief if I don't have a signed 2026 Fee relief declaration and consent form?

Emma: No, you cannot.

You cannot give a child fee relief unless the family has completed a new 2026 Fee relief declaration and consent form.

For an example, a parent cannot sign a 2025 Fee relief declaration and consent form and receive 2026 fee relief funding.

To receive fee relief funding in 2026, the family, carer or guardian must sign a 2026 Fee relief declaration consent form.

Jess: Thanks Em.

And for our final question, which is a really good one because we do get asked this quite often, is what is the process if I don't think I have enough 4-year-old fee relief payment allocated to my service for 2026?

Emma: A great question. If your service is experiencing a shortfall in 4YO+ Fee Relief, you can use the 4YO+ Program Payment funds as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible children.

The 2026 Fee Relief payment adjustment process will open from the 29th of January 2027, where services will be able to able to submit data of their correctly expended 2026 Fee Relief payments and apply for a fee relief adjustment.

Jess: Thanks for that Em. That brings us to the end of our Q&A session.

As previously mentioned, these questions and the questions you've asked today throughout the webinar will be used to inform our Frequently Asked Questions for 2026.

And I'm now going to hand over to Nat to bring our webinar to a close.

Natalie: Thanks Jess, and thanks Emma.

Those are some of our common questions and frequently asked questions.

I can't help myself.

I'm going to squeeze in one more.

We've got a really good question. I'm just going to answer quickly.

The question was, is a child identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander eligible for maximum fee relief if my service is located in a major city?

The answer is yes.

The location of the service does not impact eligibility for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child.

The child is eligible for maximum fee relief where the family identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and that applies irrespective of the location of the service.

Thanks. That brings us to the close of the question and answer and to the close of our webinar.

Thank you everyone for taking the time out of your day to join our webinar.

We hope you found it valuable as you plan for 2026.

If you have a mobile phone to hand, we'd appreciate your feedback by a very short optional survey using the QR code on the screen.

If I just go to the final slide, this is important contact information.

So we realised there was a lot of information presented today.

It's not your only opportunity to engage with us, of course.

Please contact the team and have a look at our web page.

We're always adding more information to the web page. At the moment you'll find, importantly, the program guidelines and other resources on there.

We've also recently added a PDF flyer for families and a template letter for families to the website and further resources,questions frequently asked questions and the video of this webinar will be posted to the website shortly.

Also, of course, you can always contact the team for questions that you have about Start Strong and in particular, funding for your service.

That brings us to a close now.

Thank you very much for attending and I hope you have a wonderful day.

Contact information

For more information about the Start Strong for Long Day Care program, please contact the department at:

- 1800 619 113
- ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au

Category:

- Early childhood education

Business Unit:

- Early Childhood Outcomes

Last updated: 21-May-2026

NSW Department of Education

2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines

This page describes the purpose, funding information and program requirements of the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program.

Key information

1. Purpose

This guidelines document provides an overview of the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program (program). It outlines the program's eligibility, calculation and payment of funding, spending rules and activities, requirements, objectives, outcomes, and evaluation approach.

The NSW Department of Education (the department) is the primary agency responsible for administering the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program. The department and the NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund are the two source agencies.

The guidelines form part of the 2026 Funding Agreement with Approved Funded Providers (providers) and may be amended or replaced by the department from time to time. Providers must comply with the current version of the program guidelines, available on the department's website.

2. Program description

The 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program provides funding to deliver affordable, quality preschool education to children aged 3 and above who are enrolled in eligible long day care services in NSW. The program value is approximately $350 million to $380 million. The 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program operates on a calendar year from 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026. Initial funding allocations for eligible services are generally calculated based on NSW enrolment data provided by the Australian Government from the representative week of 23 June to 29 June 2025 (June 2025 Data).

Funding is provided for children in the 2 years before school and incentivises enrolments of 600 hours per year. Evidence shows that this level of participation in a quality early childhood education program in the 2 years before school is associated with better outcomes for children.

Start Strong for Long Day Care provides funding through 4 streams:

- **4YO+ Program Payment –** provides program funding for children aged 4 and above, scaled for enrolments above and below 600 hours, and with 50% loading for:

  - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
  - services located in areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage
- **4YO+ Fee Relief Payment** – provides fee relief for families of children aged 4 and above
- **3YO Program Trial Payment** - provides program funding for children aged 3 with 50% loading for:
  - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
  - services located in areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage
- **3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment** provides fee relief for families of children aged 3.

3. Key changes in 2026

3.1 Overview of Quality Uplift

The department reserves the right to pause or cease funding to any service where the service's quality ratings in any of 7 Quality Areas (QA) of the National Quality Standard (NQS) do not lift to 'Meeting' or above, within an appropriate timeframe, as determined by the department.

A service may be directed to participate in quality uplift activities or in the department's **Quality Support Program** or any other program, to lift ratings to 'Meeting' or above.

See **Section 16 Quality uplift** for more information.

3.2 Distinction between not-for-profit and for-profit providers

Funding is being directed to not-for-profit services. Funding is also being directed to children attending a for-profit service located in areas of disadvantage. See **Section 7.4 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** and **Section 5 Definition of not-for-profit and for-profit providers** for more information.

3.3 Children eligible for maximum funding

Children eligible for maximum funding include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, children attending a service located in regional and remote areas, and areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage. See **Section 7.1 Definition of children eligible for maximum funding** and **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** for more information.

3.4 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations

4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations are different for not-for-profit providers and for-profit providers. There are also different rates depending on the SEIFA decile of for-profit services. See **Section 7.3 Indexation** and **Section 7.4 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** for updated 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations.

3.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations

4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations are different for children eligible for maximum funding. See **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** for updated 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations

3.6 Quarterly payments

All four funding streams 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment, 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment will be paid in four equal quarterly instalments:

1. Quarter 1 payments (January to March 2026) expected by 19 December 2025
2. Quarter 2 payments (April to June 2026) expected by 30 April 2026
3. Quarter 3 payments (July to September 2026) expected by 31 July 2026
4. Quarter 4 payments (October to December 2026) expected by 31 October 2026.

See **Section 8 Payment of funding in equal quarterly payments** for more information.

3.7 Remaining fee relief and unspent funds

Remaining fee relief is fee relief that may be allocated to eligible children in the service in some circumstances. Unspent funds refer to funds that may need to be returned to the department. These terms replace the terms 'Reserved', 'Surplus' and 'Unexpended' funds. See **Section 9.7 Remaining fee relief funds** for more information.

3.8 Strengthening accountability and oversight of remaining fee relief funds expenditure

Where a family's gap fees have been reduced to zero in a regular billing period, the provider may spend remaining fee relief funds to cover any additional charges imposed on the eligible child, such as levies. Any remaining fee relief funds can then only be used to cover a shortfall of total fee relief to the service. Services can no longer use surplus funds to reduce other children's fees at the service's discretion. See **Section 9.7.2 Where gap fees have been reduced to zero** for more information.

3.9 Simplified transfer of service process

The transfer of service process has been simplified to improve continuity of fee relief funding to families, improve outcomes for providers, and reduce provider administrative burden. See **Section 13.2 Transferring a service** for more information.

4. Program key dates

These dates are indicative only to assist providers and applicants with their planning and may be subject to change. Any changes will be communicated to providers and applicants.

June 2025

NSW enrolment data collected by the Australian Government for the representative week of 23 June to 29 June 2025 (June 2025 Data) which will be used to calculate initial 2026 annual allocations.

November 2025

Applicable 2026 Terms and Conditions released in the Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS).

December 2025

Processing of all Quarter 1 payments (January to March 2026) expected by 19 December 2025:

1. 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment
2. 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment
3. 4YO+ Program Payment
4. 3YO Program Trial Payment.

February 2026

NSW enrolment data collected by the Australian Government for the representative week of 23 February to 1 March 2026 (February 2026 Data) unless otherwise advised, which may be used for funding calculations and adjustments.

April 2026

Processing of all Quarter 2 payments (April to June 2026) expected by 30 April 2026:

1. 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment
2. 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment
3. 4YO+ Program Payment
4. 3YO Program Trial Payment.

June 2026

NSW enrolment data collected by the Australian Government for the representative week of 22 June to 28 June 2026 (June 2026 Data) unless otherwise advised, which may be used for funding calculations and adjustments.

July 2026

Processing of all Quarter 3 payments (July to September 2026) expected by 31 July 2026:

1. 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment
2. 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment
3. 4YO+ Program Payment
4. 3YO Program Trial Payment.

October 2026

Processing of all Quarter 4 payments (October to December 2026) expected by 31 October 2026:

1. 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment
2. 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment
3. 4YO+ Program Payment
4. 3YO Program Trial Payment.

November 2026

Processing of 4YO+ Program Payment adjustments for additional equity enrolments for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and for services located in SEIFA Deciles 1 and 2 (most disadvantaged).

5. Definition of not-for-profit and for-profit providers

A not-for-profit provider is an organisation or entity that operates an early childhood education and care service without generating a profit for owners or shareholders. All profit is reinvested into the service, resources and facilities.

A for-profit provider is an organisation or entity that operates an early childhood education and care service that aims to generate profit for its owners or shareholders.

6. Program eligibility

6.1 Service eligibility criteria and decision-maker

To be considered eligible for funding under any of the Start Strong for Long Day Care funding streams, a provider must ensure its service/s meet all of the following criteria:

- have service approval for its service to operate under either:
  - the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (National Law) and *Education and Care Services National Regulations*, and operate as a centre-based service and have checked the long day care Nature of Care field unde Service Details on the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQAITS), or
  - the *Children (Education and Care Services) National Law Application Act 2010 (NSW)*, the *Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Act 2011 (NSW)* or *Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementar Provisions Regulation 2024 (NSW)*, and be a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS), an Occasional education and care service or a Mobile education and care service
- be approved to operate a service and administer the Child Care Subsidy under the **Family Assistance Law** and be operating and reporting with a Centre Based Day Care (CBDC) approval through the Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS)
- deliver a quality early childhood education program to children aged 3 and above, that is:
  - delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher (ECT) in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality Framework and

   - based on the Early Years Framework.

  Note: the early childhood education program for 3-year-old children need only be developed by a qualified ECT in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality Framework; and

- accept and comply with the Early Childhood Outcomes Commissioned Programs – Funding Agreement – Terms and Conditions – 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026 (Terms and Conditions).

The department reserves the right to pause or cease funding in alignment with any decisions made by the Australian Government regarding its funding of a service approved or previously approved to administer the Child Care Subsidy under the Family Assistance Law.

Services must take reasonable steps to deliver 600 hours of quality preschool to children in the two years before school at their service.

The Start Strong for Long Day Care program is an open non-competitive program as this best supports the delivery of affordable quality preschool education for 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in eligible long day care services in NSW.

The department determines eligibility of funded services annually (or more often where required) which is generally based on NSW enrolment data provided by the Australian Government from the representative week of 23 June to 29 June 2025 (June 2025 Data). The department may consider any other details provided by the provider or other parts of the department to assist in the determination of funding eligibility. See Section 6.4 Identifying eligible services and assessment process.

The eligibility of a service to receive funding remains at the discretion of the decision maker consistent with the Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines. Where a service is unable to meet the eligibility criteria, the department will determine the best course of action.

Funding for eligible services is calculated as outlined in Section 7 Calculation and payment of funding.

Funding is approved as per financial delegations within the department's Early Childhood Outcomes division. This means, depending on the grant value, funding is approved by either the Manager, Start Strong for Long Day Care, the Director, Sector Programs, the Executive Director, Programs and Local Operations or the Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes.

6.2 Occasional education and care services

Occasional education and care services regulated under the *Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010 (NSW),* or the *Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Act 2011 (NSW)* can receive funding under the Start Strong for Long Day Care program, subject to the above Start Strong eligibility criteria being met.

6.3 Mobile education and care services

Mobile education and care services regulated under the *Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010 (NSW), Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Act 2011 (NSW),* or *Children (Education and Care Services) Supplementary Provisions Regulation 2024 (NSW)* can receive funding under the Start Strong for Long Day Care program, subject to the above Start Strong eligibility criteria being met.

State funded mobile education and care services and their mobile venues funded through the Mobile Preschool Funding Program or Start Strong for Community Preschools program are not eligible for Start Strong for Long Day Care funding.

6.4 Identifying eligible services and assessment process

Providers are not required to apply for this program. As outlined above, the department determines eligibility of funded services based on June 2025 Data and their ability to meet the eligibility criteria. For new services, the department will conduct regular checks to identify eligible services, and their providers based on the February 2026 Data and June 2026 Data.

See Section 13.1 New services for further details.

6.5 Child eligibility criteria

For a provider to be eligible for 4YO+ Program Payment and 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding under Start Strong for Long Day Care, for a child, that child must be:

- the age of 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2026 (the child's birthdate must be on, or before, 31 July 2022)
- attending the provider's eligible early childhood education program
- a confirmed enrolment with the service in the CCSS
- not yet in compulsory schooling.

For a provider to be eligible for 3YO Program Trial Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding under Start Strong for Long Day Care, for a child, that child must be:

- the age of 3 years old and not yet 4 years old on, or before, 31 July in 2026 (the child's birthdate must be on, or between, 1 August 2022 to 31 July 2023)
- attending the provider's eligible early childhood education program
- a confirmed enrolment with the service in the CCSS
- not yet in compulsory schooling.

Children who are 6 years old will be eligible for funding. Where required, a Certificate of Exemption as per the **Exemption from School Procedures policy** from compulsory schooling must be in place.

Families do not have to be eligible or receiving the CCS to be eligible for Start Strong funding. The child must be a confirmed enrolment in the service data captured in the CCSS.

Children do not have to be in the preschool room to be eligible for Start Strong for Long Day Care funding. All children who meet the eligibility criteria are eligible regardless of the room they attend.

Citizenship and residency status are not taken into consideration for eligibility of children for funding under Start Strong for Long Day Care.

7. Calculation and payment of funding

7.1 Definition of children eligible for maximum funding

A child is eligible for maximum funding if one of the following criteria is met:

1. All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, or
2. Children that attend a service:

- located in an Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote region in NSW based on 2021 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) produced by the University of Adelaide (Australian Centre for Housing Research) and used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, or
- located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 or 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021, or
- operated by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

7.2 Initial funding calculations

The initial 4YO+ Program Payment, 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, 3YO Program Trial Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment for eligible services is calculated based on NSW enrolment data provided by the Australian Government from the representative week of 23 June to 29 June 2025 (June 2025 Data).

4YO+ Program Payment and 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment calculations based on June 2025 Data will include children who are at least 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2025 (the child's birthdate must be on, or before, 31 July 2021).

3YO Program Trial Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment calculations based on June 2025 Data will include children who are 3 years old and not yet 4 years old on, or before, 31 July in 2025 (the child's birthdate must be on, or between, 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2022).

The department will communicate initial funding amounts, including a breakdown of loadings and the number of eligible fee relief enrolments funded, to the approved providers of eligible services via email.

7.3 Indexation

The department will make decisions on the application of indexation to funding rates on an annual basis. If indexation is applied, the department will be guided by NSW Treasury determined rates. The department will communicate any changes to the funding rates arising from indexation via the funding notification letter emailed to approved providers.

7.4 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculations

7.4.1 4YO+ Program Payment funding rates and calculations

The 4YO+ Program Payment is provided per enrolment for eligible children in an eligible not-for-profit or for-profit service as per Tables 1 to 3 below.

Children who are enrolled for 600 hours or more per year will receive the full rate of 4YO+ Program Payment funding, and children enrolled for fewer than 600 hours will receive 67% of the full amount (regardless of the number of hours enrolled).

An additional 50% loading is provided for Equity Enrolments:

- for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children; or
- if the service is located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 or 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021.

SEIFA information of the service is determined by the Australian Government using the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021 provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Providers will only receive one amount of loading per Equity Enrolment.

7.4.2 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculation

The 3YO Program Trial Payment is provided per enrolment for eligible children in an eligible not-for-profit or for-profit service as per Tables 1 to 3 below.

Children who are enrolled for 600 hours or more per year will receive the same rate of 3YO Program Trial Payment funding as children enrolled for fewer than 600 hours.

An additional 50% loading is provided for Equity Enrolments on top of standard amount per enrolment:

- for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children; or
- if the service is in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a SEIFA Decile of 1 and 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021.

SEIFA information of the service is determined by the Australian Government using the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021 provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Providers will only receive one amount of loading per Equity Enrolment, either the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading or the SEIFA Decile of 1 or 2 Loading.

7.4.3 Not-for-profit providers

Table 1: Not-for profit services located in all SEIFA deciles 1-10

Providers will only receive one amount of loading per Equity Enrolment, either the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading or the SEIFA Decile of 1 or 2 Loading in Table 1.

	Amount per enrolment	Equity Enrolment - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading	Equity Enrolment - SEIFA Decile of 1 or 2 Loading
4YO+ children enrolled for 600 hours or more	$1,092	$546	$546
4YO+ children enrolled for less than 600 hours	$732	$366	$366
All 3-year-old children enrolled	$532	$266	$266

7.4.4 For-profit providers

Table 2: For-profit services located in SEIFA deciles 1-5

Providers will only receive one amount of loading per Equity Enrolment, either the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading or the SEIFA Decile of 1 or 2 Loading in Table 2.

	Amount per enrolment	Equity Enrolment - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading	Equity Enrolment - SEIFA Decile of 1 or 2 Loading
4YO+ children enrolled for 600 hours or more	$1,092	$546	$546
4YO+ children enrolled for less than 600 hours	$732	$366	$366
All 3-year-old children enrolled	$532	$266	$266

Table 3: For-profit services located in SEIFA deciles 6-10

	Amount per enrolment	Equity Enrolment - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading
4YO+ children enrolled for 600 hours or more	$546	$273

	Amount per enrolment	Equity Enrolment - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Loading
4YO+ children enrolled for less than 600 hours	$366	$183
All 3-year-old children enrolled	$266	$133

7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations

The 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment are calculated:

- as an annual flat rate allocation per enrolment for eligible children as per Tables 4-5 irrespective of the number of hours the child is enrolled per week.
- at the same rate for not-for-profit and for-profit services.

Table 4: Children eligible for maximum funding

	Amount per enrolment
4YO+ Fee Relief payment flat rate	$2,563
3YO Fee Relief Trial payment flat rate	$769

Table 5: All other children

	Amount per enrolment
4YO+ Fee Relief payment flat rate	$1,783
3YO Fee Relief Trial payment flat rate	$423

7.6 Adjustments

7.6.1 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment Equity Enrolment adjustments (for increases in enrolments of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and for services located in SEIFA deciles 1 and 2)

Equity enrolments are defined in Section 7.4.1 4YO+ Program Payment funding rates and calculations and 7.4.2 3YO Program Trial Payment funding rates and calculation, namely:

1. enrolments of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in any service
2. all services located in SEIFA deciles 1 and 2.

Adjustments to 4YO+ Program Payment funding will be applied by the end of 2026 to reflect an increase in Equity Enrolment numbers enrolled for 600 hours or more only, using February 2026 Data.

Adjustments to 3YO Program Trial Payment funding will be applied by the end of 2026 to reflect an increase in Equity Enrolment numbers only, using February 2026 Data.

A 4YO+ Program Adjustment Payment, or 3YO Program Trial Adjustment Payment, is calculated as the total of the relevant amount per enrolment plus the corresponding Equity Enrolment amount in Tables 1 to 3 above, for each increase from February 2026 Data when compared to the June 2025 Data.

7.6.2 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Top Up Payment

The voluntary fee relief data submission process under 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care will open from 29 January 2027. Services only need to submit fee relief data if they need a 2026 fee relief funding top up payment because the funding received in 2026 was not enough to cover correctly expended fee relief for all eligible children under these program guidelines.

If services need a 2026 fee relief funding top up, they need to submit fee relief data once for the reporting period 1 January to 31 December 2026 in the **Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS)**. Services must retain a copy of the signed Fee relief declaration and consent form for each eligible child. The department may require you to provide to the department a copy of each signed Fee relief declaration and consent form and the child's weekly fee statement showing the fee relief provided after the application of the Child Care Subsidy.

The department will provide further information by 1 December 2026.

8. Payment of funding in equal quarterly payments

The provider will not be paid unless the Early Childhood Outcomes Programs and Local Operations – Funding Agreement – Terms and Conditions – 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026 (Terms and Conditions) are accepted in **Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS)**. Providers must accept the Terms and Conditions in ECCMS before 31 January 2026 or a specified date as communicated by the department. Funding will not be paid if a provider accepts Terms and Conditions in ECCMS after 31 January 2026, unless otherwise agreed with the department.

The 4YO+ Program Payment, 3YO Program Trial Payment, 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment will be paid in quarterly instalments, unless otherwise advised by the department, according to the schedule outlined below:

1. Quarter 1 payments (January to March 2026) expected by 19 December 2025
2. Quarter 2 payments (April to June 2026) expected by 30 April 2026
3. Quarter 3 payments (July to September 2026) expected by 31 July 2026
4. Quarter 4 payments (October to December 2026) expected by 31 October 2026.

The department can make changes to the above payment schedule at any stage and providers will be notified of the change. The department does not require the agreement of providers to make changes to the payment schedule above.

ECCMS is the online system used by the department to manage funding and contracting arrangements with early childhood education service providers. Funding amounts (excluding GST) are detailed in ECCMS through the 'Payments' tab on the Funding Specification.

9. Spending rules and activities

9.1 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment spending rules

The full amount of 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding should be expended for those purposes and targeted to benefit children aged 3 and above in 2026. All program payment spending should directly support the delivery of high-quality early childhood education and care to align with the 7 Quality Areas of National Quality Standards (NQS). This ensures that every expenditure contributes to ongoing service improvement and positive outcomes for children.

The provider must spend the 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds allocated to each service to:

- pay salary and wages for Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) and educators to deliver a quality early childhood educatior program
  - pay salary and wages for ECTs and educators contracted in an ongoing/permanent, temporary/fixed term or casua arrangement

    - pay salary and wages for additional/supernumerary ECTs and educators to improve staff/child experiences and outcomes
- purchase functional or educational resources or equipment (excluding capital works projects such as renovations and repairs to existing buildings or premises):
    - literature such as books, magazines, and posters
    - digital technology such as e-readers, iPads, interactive screens, and SMART boards
    - art and craft materials
    - sensory toys and aids
    - resources for outdoor learning spaces and physical activity such as sport and game equipment
    - musical instruments
    - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural activities and resources
    - multicultural activities and resources
    - first aid and safety resources
    - storage solutions in the preschool room
    - inclusive furniture in the preschool room
    - play equipment.
- develop and/or deliver a quality early childhood educational program based on the **Early Years Learning Framework**, including associated staffing costs:
    - incursions and/or excursions – the delivery of a specialised education program by an external provider within the service or outside of the service – including transportation costs e.g., to deliver children's programs such as protective behaviours
    - purchase program materials e.g., materials for programs such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, nature pedagogy, engaging visual artists – art program, and outdoor learning programs like beehives
- support capability uplift of ECTs and educators through professional development and further study, including associated staffing costs
    - support staff to upgrade their qualifications from a certificate to a diploma
    - support staff to upgrade their qualification from a diploma to a 4-year degree
    - traineeships
    - mentorship initiatives
    - study leave
    - internally or externally delivered training, professional development and conference fees e.g., mental health first aid, safeguarding and child protection training, circle of security and relational pedagogy professional developmen
    - NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) approved training
    - subscriptions to ECEC journals and membership fees to professional bodies
- attract and retain ECTs and educators
    - advertising ECT and educator positions
    - monetary bonuses for retention and recognition of length of service and experience, including:
        - sign on bonuses
        - longevity bonuses
        - hire casual staff to allow adequate programming time for staff
        - relocation payments
- wellbeing supports for ECTs and educators
    - counselling sessions
    - individual support
    - team building
    - hire casual staff to enable team building time
    - paid attendance at outside of hours staff meetings
    - wellbeing focussed training courses
- reduce non-fee related barriers that families face when accessing quality early childhood education programs provided by long day care services
    - transportation initiatives
    - food initiatives such as a breakfast program
    - clothing related (hats)

    - assist families to complete enrolment forms and Child Care Subsidy applications
- improve or maintain the service's quality rating to Meeting or Exceeding the National Quality Standards
- any combination of the above.

9.2 Loadings for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children spending rules

Where a service has received loadings to their 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment, the provider is required to spend the loadings to deliver targeted culturally responsive initiatives and support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. See **Section 7 Calculation and payment of funding** for more information on loadings. Examples of the effective use of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander loading may look different in each service and community and may include:

- reaching out to the community and collaborating on a place-based solution for the children and their families
- creating a safe and culturally responsive learning environment
- strengthening staff capability and awareness of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture, people and history.

For example: having staff attend Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training.

9.3 Loadings for services which operate within SEIFA deciles 1- 2 score of relative socio-economic disadvantage spending rules

Examples of the effective use of the relative socio-economic disadvantage loading will look different in each service, and include:

- targeted recruitment, attraction, and retention incentives to increase the proportion of staff from diverse backgrounds
- building ECTs and educator's capabilities to work in more inclusive and diverse work settings and implement targeted and individualised programs to ensure that children with relative disadvantage receive support to achieve their potential
- initiatives to reduce non-fee related barriers that low-income families face including transportation, food, and clothing initiatives
- outreach and continued engagement with low-income families to support access and participation.

9.4 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment spending rules

4YO+ Fee Relief Payments cannot be used to provide fee relief for 3YO children.

3YO Fee Relief Trial Payments cannot be used to provide fee relief for 4YO+ children.

Fee relief spending rules apply to both the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment.

Fee relief must be offered by the provider to the families of all children that meet **Section 6.5 Child eligibility criteria**.

Fee relief must be provided to children eligible for maximum funding at the rates outlined in Table 4 in **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** and calculations.

Fee relief must be provided to other children at the rates outlined in Table 5 in **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** and calculations.

Funds must be expended before the end of 2026.

The 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment must be applied as a weekly reduction to a family's session fee or gap fee (after the Child Care Subsidy has been applied) divided equally across the total service operating weeks for the calendar year.

In situations where families pay any difference between the provider's fee and the Child Care Subsidy amount (gap fee), the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment reduces the gap fee and/or additional charges. Any outstanding gap fees or additional charges after the Child Care Subsidy and 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment, or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment, have been applied must be paid by the family.

In situations where 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funds received by the approved provider are not sufficient to provide fee relief at the requisite rate to all the families of eligible children, an adjustment of additional funding from the department to the provider may be made. See the **Section 9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding** for more information.

9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding

4YO+ Program Payment funds can be used as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible children where the initial 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment allocation does not cover the number of eligible children accessing fee relief.

3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible children where the initial 3YO Fee Relief Payment allocation does not cover the number of eligible children accessing fee relief.

The funds need to be expended during the 2026 calendar year, unless otherwise agreed to by the department. 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funding that is not fully spent in accordance with the spending rules is considered in **Section 17.4 Management of unspent funds**.

The 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment adjustment process will open from 29 January 2027. See **Section 7.6.2 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Top Up Payment** and **Section 9.6 4YO+ Fee Relief Adjustment Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Adjustment Payment spending rules** for more information.

The provider must maintain records or documents for the purposes of reporting or funding compliance review, as evidence of expenditure and provide it to the department on request. Further information on record keeping requirements is available in **Section 17.2 Financial accountability and compliance**.

9.6 4YO+ Fee Relief Adjustment Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Adjustment Payment spending rules

A 4YO+ Fee Relief Adjustment Payment and/or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Adjustment Payment is to be expended to top up 2026 fee relief funding only if the department determines the service experienced a fee relief shortfall in 2026, meaning the service applied fee relief to families at the requisite rates and in accordance with these program guidelines, including **Section 9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding**. The 2026 4YO+ Fee Relief Adjustment Payment can be used to top up shortfalls in 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding as per **Section 9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding** only. 3YO Fee Relief Trial Adjustment Payment can be used to top up shortfalls in 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding as per **Section 9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding** only.

If the 2026 4YO+ Fee Relief Adjustment Payment and/or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Adjustment Payment exceeds the funds a service expended on 2026 fee relief to eligible families as per **Section 9.5 4YO+ Program Payment and 3YO Program Trial Payment funds can be used to cover shortfalls in fee relief funding**, you may be required to return the unspent funds to the department as per **Section 17.4 Management of unspent funds**.

9.7 Remaining fee relief funds

Providers are required to manage their fee relief funds based on the changing number of enrolments and families/carers who claim fee relief from their service. A service can only provide fee relief to a child up to the eligible fee rate. See **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** for fee relief rates.

4YO+ Fee Relief Payments cannot be used to provide fee relief for 3YO children.

3YO Fee Relief Trial Payments cannot be used to provide fee relief for 4YO+ children.

9.7.1 Where a service's current enrolments are less than what is funded

These funds are remaining funds when a service's enrolments are lower than the number of funded places.

This can happen in situations such as:

- a child leaves the service, creating a vacancy.
- a family chooses not to receive fee relief from the service.
- an enrolment place is vacant.

These funds cannot be used until an additional eligible child nominates to receive fee relief from the service. The provider must retain these fee relief funds and may be required to return funds to the department as unspent funds.

9.7.2 Where gap fees have been reduced to zero

Where a family's gap fees have been reduced to zero in a regular billing period, the provider may spend remaining fee relief funds to cover any additional charges imposed on the eligible child such as levies, and only up to the maximum amount of fee relief for that child. See **Section 7.5 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding rates and calculations** for fee relief rates. Levies are additional charges that a service may apply to families on top of regular daily fees. See **Section 21 Glossary of terms** for more information.

Remaining fee relief funds from the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment for the eligible child may then be used to cover any shortfall in total 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding to the service for other eligible children aged 4 and above, and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each other child.

Any remaining funds from the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment for the eligible child may then be used to cover any shortfall in total 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funding to the service for other eligible children aged 3 years old, and only up to the maximum eligible fee relief rate applicable to each other child.

If there are 4YO+ Fee Relief and/or 3YO Fee Relief Trial funds remaining after covering the shortfall, these are unspent funds and may need to be returned to the department.

10. Children enrolled at multiple services under this program

If a child is enrolled in more than one service (e.g. at another long day care or preschool service), including with the same provider, they can only access the Fee Relief Payment from one service at a time.

Where a service receives funding under Start Strong for Long Day Care and Start Strong for Community Preschools, children can only access the Fee Relief Payment from one funding program.

Families must complete a Fee relief declaration and consent form as outlined under **Section 12.1 Fee relief declaration and consent form** to nominate which service they will access the fee relief from. For each additional service the child is enrolled at, families must complete an additional Fee relief declaration and consent form, stating that they are not claiming fee relief at that service (as they are claiming fee relief elsewhere).

The department will conduct compliance checks as part of its auditing process. Providers are required to retain Fee relief declaration and consent forms for this purpose as per **Section 17.3 Record keeping and funding compliance review**.

If a provider receives the Fee Relief Payment for a child whose family declares they will not claim fee relief from their service, the provider must quarantine the funding as remaining fee relief funds as outlined in **Section 9.7 Remaining fee relief funds**.

11. Fee guidelines

In line with the affordability objectives of the program and **Section 6.1 Service eligibility criteria and decision-maker**:

- Providers are not permitted to increase their service's fees to offset the benefit of the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment or 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment.
- Before fee relief or any other subsidies (for example, the Child Care Subsidy) is applied, the fee for children in the same cohort must be the same irrespective of eligibility for fee relief at the service.

If a provider does not comply with either of the things listed in the 2 dot points above, this may be considered to be an Event of Default under the Terms and Conditions, entitling the department to pause or cease funding. In circumstances where it is necessary to adjust fees, such as due to reasonable increases in operating costs or decrease in fee relief rates, providers must retain evidence to support the fee increase.

11.1 Priority of access

Services are encouraged to give priority of access to:

- children who are at least 4 years old on, or before, 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school
- children who are at least 3 years old on, or before, 31 July in that preschool year and are:
  - children from low-income families
  - children with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background
  - children with disability or additional needs
  - children with English language needs
- children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

There is no order of priority assigned to the list of points above. Services should give priority to the groups outlined above before any other groups, including 3-year-olds not eligible for equity loading.

Provisions relating to priority of access are intended to assist services with making enrolment decisions in a way that seeks to allocate places to those in the greatest need. Services may give priority to enrolments for 600 hours or more and consider the hours children are enrolled at other funded services when making enrolment decisions. However, particular community and family needs will also be relevant.

Services are reminded they should consider any adjustments to policies and procedures required to comply with regulatory requirements when obtaining and sharing personal information, including privacy laws.

12. Documenting fee relief

12.1 Fee relief declaration and consent form

Providers are required to collect a completed Fee relief declaration and consent form for all enrolled children who are eligible for fee relief.

The **Fee relief declaration and consent form (PDF 386 KB)** is available for download. This form declares whether the chilc is enrolled at another service, and whether the family will be claiming fee relief from the service or from another long day care service or community preschool. The form is also used for families to consent to sharing the fee relief data collected on their child at each service with the department.

The department will conduct compliance checks as part of its auditing process. Providers are required to retain Fee relief declaration and consent forms for this purpose as per **Section 17.3 Record keeping and funding compliance review**.

To assist services to communicate regarding the Fee relief declaration and consent form to families, services can download a **template letter (DOCX 50 KB)** to place on their letterhead. This letter explains what the funding is for, how it will be applied to their fees and why they need to complete the form and provide consent.

Fee relief under this program cannot be provided to families of eligible children where:

- consent has not been obtained through a completed Fee relief declaration and consent form
- a complete Fee relief declaration and consent form states that the family is receiving fee relief at another service.

In the above circumstances, providers must quarantine the Fee Relief Payment for the enrolment places filled by these children as remaining fee relief funds in accordance with **Section 9.7 Remaining fee relief funds**.

12.2 Fee relief invoicing and data

The provider must demonstrate and communicate the fee reduction from 4YO+ Fee Relief Payments and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payments to families through regular statements, which attribute the fee relief to the NSW Government.

The provider must advise families when the 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment will commence and the frequency at which it will be applied, and that it does not impact their Child Care Subsidy payment.

Registered Child Care Subsidy System (CCSS) software providers are asked to ensure services can meet software support for fee relief invoicing and fee relief data collection.

12.2.1 Software support: Fee relief invoicing

Services need to demonstrate and communicate with families through regular statements, the weekly fee relief reduction, after Australian Government Child Care Subsidy (CCS) payment has been applied.

Fee statements/invoices to families generated by services software should display the below information:

- daily fee
- CCS deduction
- fee relief payment from NSW Government
- further fee relief reduction using remaining fee relief funds
- any gap fee still to be paid by families
- any other standard information.

Services' software should be able to produce invoices/statements with the above information. A manual process will be required for services that do not use software.

12.2.2 Software support: fee relief data collection

The department may ask for the fee relief data collected at services for funding assurance, to determine fee relief funding adjustments, identify families who may be incorrectly claiming fee relief at multiple services, or evaluate the Star Strong for Long Day Care program. The technical specification (XSLX 29 KB) for fee relief data can support services in fee relief data collection.

Services may provide this technical specification (XSLX 29 KB) to their software vendor.

12.2.3 Collection and data security

The department will protect all data received in accordance with security and privacy compliance guidelines.

13. New services and transferred services

Funding to new services and receiving approved providers of a transferred service is not immediate or guaranteed. The department relies on data from the Australian Government via the Child Care Subsidy System to determine eligibility of funding and funding calculations.

The department must confirm provider and service eligibility and must conduct due processes before payments are made to new services and receiving approved providers of a transferred service.

13.1 New services

The department will conduct checks to identify eligible new services, and their providers based on the February 2026 Data and June 2026 Data or other available CCS data. In addition, the department may conduct an application process in 2026. Providers with services that opened and are providing education to enrolled and attending children may be eligible for funding and may receive email communication from the department. Information supplied in the application process will be considered in the assessment for eligibility.

Providers should note that the service's opening date may be later than the service approval date. All eligible approved providers will receive communication from the department.

13.2 Transferring a service

The transferring approved provider may be eligible for quarterly payments up until the transfer effective date. The receiving approved provider may be eligible for quarterly payments after the transfer effective date. Quarterly payments are not adjusted according to the effective transfer date. See the **Guiding principles and policies** webpage.

Approved providers must follow steps to comply with regulatory requirements under the National Law and Regulations, including submitting an application for service transfer to the NSW Regulatory Authority.

13.2.1 Transferring approved provider

If an approved provider is transferring a service to another approved provider, then the transferring approved provider must do the following:

- Contact the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au** when the transfer has been initiated with the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).
- Comply with their obligations under the Terms and Conditions in regard to clause 21.13 Assignment and novation.
- Immediately contact the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au** to confirm once the transfer has taken effect.
- Complete all outstanding financial accountability statements in ECCMS. The department will advise of any additional manual financial accountability statements that require completion for the funded period up to the service transfer effective date.
- Return any unspent funds to the department within the timeframe advised by the department. The transferring approved provider must not under any circumstances transfer any unspent funds to the receiving approved provider (e.g. as part of a sale of business), either by way of adjustment between the 2 parties or any means.
- Comply with any direction by the department under the Funding Agreement.
- Cease expending funding from the transfer effective date unless otherwise agreed with the department.

The department may use fee relief data to assess the number of eligible children receiving fee relief at the service at the time of transfer and calculate fee relief funding adjustments for the transferring approved provider for the period up to the date of transfer.

If an approved provider transfers a service to another approved provider, at its discretion the department may take actions and may withhold funding from the transferring approved provider of the service, after the transfer is initiated or after the transfer is effective in NQAITS.

13.2.2 Receiving approved provider

There is no guarantee the receiving approved provider will receive any funding in 2026.

If an approved provider is receiving a service from another approved provider, then the receiving approved provider must do the following to be considered eligible to receive funding:

- Contact the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au** when the transfer has been initiated.
- Immediately contact the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au** to confirm once the transfer has taken effect.
- Complete required documentation as directed by the department and enter into a Funding Agreement with the department.
- Collect a completed Fee relief declaration and consent form for all enrolled children that are eligible for fee relief after the transfer is effective. Under no circumstances, have accepted the transfer of any unspent funds from the transferring approved provider (e.g. as part of a sale of business), either by way of adjustment between the 2 parties or any means. If the receiving approved provider has accepted any unspent funds (by way of adjustment or any means), it must advise the department, and the department may request the return of unspent funds to the department.

The receiving approved provider is not required to provide fee relief to the families of eligible children at the service before:

- service eligibility has been confirmed

- the provider has accepted the 2026 Funding Agreement in ECCMS, the service receives Fee Relief Payment funding into the nominated bank account

The provider is responsible for any business consequences of an operational decision of the provider to provide fee relief prior to fee relief payments being determined or for any of the other reasons listed above.

Quarterly payments will be determined by the status of the receiving approved provider at the first day of the quarter. The receiving approved provider will be eligible for the first quarterly payment after the transfer effective date as at the first day of the next relevant quarter:

- 1 January 2026 for Quarter 1 (January to March 2026)
- 1 April 2026 for Quarter 2 (April to June 2026)
- 1 July 2026 for Quarter 3 (July to September 2026)
- 1 October 2026 for Quarter 4 (October to December 2026).

Example: The transfer effective date is 7 February 2026. Quarter 2 payments are made to the receiving approved provider from 1 April 2026.

4YO+ Program Payment funds may also be used as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible 4-year-old+ children where the initial 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment allocation does not cover the number of eligible children accessing fee relief.

3YO Program Trial Payment funds may also be used as an interim measure to provide fee relief to families of eligible 3-year-old children where the initial 3YO Fee Relief Payment allocation does not cover the number of eligible children accessing fee relief.

The voluntary fee relief data submission process under 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care will open from 29 January 2027. Services may submit fee relief data if they need a 2026 fee relief funding top up payment because the funding received in 2026 was not enough to cover fee relief expenditure for all eligible children.

The department may withhold funding from the receiving approved provider of the service until the transfer is effective.

14. Services ceasing to operate

If a service is to close/cease trading or is voluntarily suspended or involuntarily suspended, prior to the date of closure, the provider must:

- contact the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au** as soon as possible notifying the department of the intended closure
- cease expending funds from the date of closure
- comply with their obligations under the Terms and Conditions, specifically in relation to Notifying Problems, Retention of Records and Event of Default
- complete all outstanding financial accountability statements in ECCMS. The department will advise of any additional financial accountability statements that require completion for the closing service for the funded period up to the date of closure. A manual financial accountability statement may need to be completed for this purpose. The financial accountability statement must be completed within 20 days of the closure of the service, unless otherwise agreed with the department
- return all unspent funds, including program payments and unspent fee relief funds to the department no later than 2(business days of the service closure date or as agreed by the department
- comply with any direction by the department under the Funding Agreement.

The department may take actions if a service has notified the department that it proposes to close/cease trading, including withholding funding for the service that is proposed to be closed/cease trading from the provider, where that funding relates to a period after the proposed date of closure.

No funding will be provided by the department for a service that has closed/ceased trading, in relation to the period after the date of closure.

Note: providers must follow steps to comply with regulatory requirements under the National Law and Regulations, including notifying the NSW Regulatory Authority within 7 days of ceasing to operate the education and care service (section 173(2)(d) of the National Law).

15. Transition to School Digital Statement

The **Transition to School Digital Statement (Statement)** provides a snapshot of a child's strengths, interests, needs and approaches to learning and supports their effective transition to Kindergarten. A positive transition from early childhood education and care to Kindergarten helps improve children's educational and social outcomes.

Completing the Statement for children in the year before they start Kindergarten is a mandatory requirement of the Start Strong program.

The child's Early Childhood Teacher (ECT) or educator must complete the Statement and provide it to the child's parents/carers and new school before the commencement of the 2026 school year. This supports learning continuity and links the Early Years Learning Frameworks to the Early Stage 1 Syllabus.

ECTs and educators can complete the Statement via the department's digital platform as the preferred method. Where access is not possible, the **PDF version** can be completed. Copies of Statements must be retained for funding compliance purposes.

Please note that parent consent must be obtained prior to starting a statement. The **Transition to School Consent form** can be uploaded onto the department's digital platform enabling the educator to then proceed with the completion of the Statement. Providers accessing Start Strong funding must retain evidence of consent or non-consent for funding compliance purposes.

If a parent or carer does not provide consent, you cannot create a Statement for their child. ECEC services should record when Statement consent is not provided for eligible children accessing Fee Relief funding and retain for funding compliance.

The Fee Relief does not have to be returned by the family to the service if the family did not consent to create a Statement.

More information on the importance of the Statement and supporting resources are available on the **Transition to School** webpage.

16. Quality uplift

A key objective of Start Strong is to support quality uplift and ensure children have access to high quality early childhood education programs that drive improved outcomes.

Over the course of the program, the department may work with services and/or approved providers of services rated as Working Towards NQS or lower in any of the 7 Quality Areas. This may involve support such as resources (**ECEC resource library** and **Sector Strengthening Partnership**), professional learning (**ECEC Professional Learning program** and **Early childhood careers** hub), or mandatory participation by a service and/or provider in quality uplift activities or in the department's **Quality Support Program** or any other program, to lift ratings to 'Meeting' or above, as directed.

The department reserves the right to pause or cease funding to any service whether or not a service utilises any of the supports above:

- if quality ratings in any of 7 Quality Areas of the NQS do not lift to 'Meeting' or above, within an appropriate timeframe, as determined by the department.

There are many resources in the **Resource library** which may be helpful including webpages on regulatory guidance to uplift quality practice across all Quality Areas.

Services can filter by theme, Quality Areas, and service type to find the resources most relevant to their context and need. We have also included further links to resources at **Section 22 More information, resources and contact details**.

17. Compliance and administrative requirements

17.1 Administrative

Providers that receive funding must:

1. ensure their service/s information in Child Care Subsidy System is correct
2. ensure the Provider Approval and Service Approval information in National Quality Agenda IT system (NQAITS) is correct and ensure the department is kept informed of any changes to the details
3. ensure the Provider Approval and Service Approval information, and main contact email in ECCMS are correct to ensure the provider receives all communications from the department
4. complete and sign the **electronic funds transfer (EFT) form** to register a new Approved Provider in departmental systems or to update banking details of an existing Approved Provider. The department will contact new providers who require an EFT form to be completed
5. nominate a person who is authorised to bind the approved provider who will be the SP-Admin Account holder in the **ECCMS**. The SP-Admin Account holder is the only person who can accept the Terms and Conditions. Only one person per provider can be nominated as SP-Admin
6. ensure that the nominated SP-Admin's myID is linked to the approved provider's Australian Business Number (ABN) in the **Relationship Authorisation Manager (RAM)** to enable access to the Terms and Conditions in ECCMS
7. email the SP-Admin details linked to the approved provider's Australian Business Number in RAM to the department at **ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au**, so that the ECCMS registration key can be provided. The ABN for the user must be identical to the ABN that will be linked to the provider in ECCMS. The department will email the registration key when the user details have been verified in ECCMS
8. ensure that the ECCMS SP-Admin account holder can log in to ECCMS successfully. Further information on how to log in to ECCMS can be found on the **ECCMS information page**
9. accept the Terms and Conditions before 31 January 2026 or a specified date as communicated by the department. The approved provider will not be paid unless the Terms and Conditions are accepted in ECCMS.

17.2 Financial accountability and compliance

In accordance with the Terms and Conditions, providers must submit a financial accountability statement for each individual service which has received funding. Submitting financial accountability statements helps to provide assurance that public funds have been expended for their intended purpose.

Financial accountability statements are completed through ECCMS. Providers will be notified when these are due. Further information is available in the **Financial Accountability Return Guide** and on the **Financial Accountability – Information for Services** page.

In the cases where services have transferred or ceased operating, a manual financial accountability form is directly provided to providers and requires completion.

17.2.1 Review of financial accountabilities

A service's financial accountability statement will be reviewed by the department.

Where there are unspent funds, the department will send a request seeking the return of unspent funds. Providers are required to return the unspent funds within 20 business days from receipt of the request.

Where there is a nil balance or deficit reported, no further action is required unless otherwise directed by the department

17.3 Record keeping and funding compliance review

The department may undertake a funding compliance review of any service in relation to Start Strong funds and require that supporting documentation and evidence be provided by the provider to the department and its representatives.

The provider must keep current, complete and accurate records in connection with the Funding Agreement including use of funding. On request, the provider must allow the department's representative access to all records, including but not limited to administrative, enrolment, accounting and financial records.

The provider must retain all records for 7 years after the end or termination of the Funding Agreement. If the provider ceases to operate then the provider must ensure that all records remain accessible to the department for the entire 7-year period.

Relevant records must be retained by the provider and provided to the department on request for the purpose of funding compliance reviews. Examples of relevant records may include but not limited to:

- proof of expenditure in accordance with the spending rules under these program guidelines
- statements to families demonstrating fee reduction and attributing fee relief to the NSW Government
- evidence for any fee increases for children eligible for fee relief
- fee relief declaration and consent forms
- Transition to School Statements
- certificates of exemption for any 6-year-old children enrolled in the service, if required
- data requested by the department that is relevant to documenting fee relief to enable allocation of program funding aligned with service enrolments.

17.4 Management of unspent funds

17.4.1 Recovery of funds

Under the Terms and Conditions, providers must notify the department of any unspent funds the provider holds at the enc of the 2026 program period by submitting a financial accountability statement and may be required to return any unspent funds, including unspent program payments and fee relief funds to the department.

17.4.2 No offsets against future payments

Providers cannot offset any unspent funds, including unspent fee relief funds against any future payments.

18. Communications

18.1 Publication of funding information

The department will publish grant funding information, including program details, provider information and funds awarded to the provider, on the NSW Government Grants and Funding Finder in line with the Grants Administration Guide.

18.2 Provider responsibilities

In addition to documenting fee relief under Section 9.4 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment and 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment spending rules, the provider is encouraged to publicly acknowledge the funding received through Start Strong and fee relief is provided to the families of eligible children with the following statement:

"*This service is a recipient of funding under the NSW Department of Education's 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program and fee relief is available for families of eligible children.*"

Such acknowledgement may be included in a regular newsletter or an annual report.

To receive the most up-to-date communication, the provider's SP-Admin account holder must review and/or update details in ECCMS. The changes can be completed in the Main Service Provider page. Providers should ensure that service details and contacts are up to date. This includes details on the Main Details tab, Contacts and Address tabs.

19. Program objectives and outcomes

19.1 Objectives

Start Strong for Long Day Care program objectives are to:

- improve affordability of preschool education
- support quality uplift in preschool education
- drive improved outcomes for children
- incentivise increased enrolment and attendance in quality early childhood education programs in the years before school.

19.2 Program principles

The guiding principles that inform how Start Strong for Long Day Care is delivered are:

Accessible: Quality early childhood education is financially within reach for all families in NSW.

Equitable: All NSW children, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage, have access to at least 600 hours per year of a high-quality early childhood education program in the years before school, which is a recommended minimum level of participation for children.

Inclusive: All services provide learning environments and programs that meet the early learning needs of all children in their community, regardless of background, ability, or socio-economic factors.

Proactive: Services will actively seek to improve enrolment and attendance for children using their service to meet the recommended level of at least 600 hours per year.

Outcomes-focussed: Children are better supported to transition to school. Families have greater confidence that the quality of the early childhood education program meets their child's developmental needs.

Evidence-based: Program is grounded in evidence that children who participate in a quality preschool education program for at least 600 hours in the year before school are more likely to arrive at school equipped with the social, cognitive, and emotional skills they need to engage in learning.

Quality: the eight principles of the Early Years Learning Framework are embedded in everyday practice of the service, namely:

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
2. Partnerships
3. Respect for diversity
4. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives
5. Equity, inclusion and high expectations
6. Sustainability
7. Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning
8. Collaborative leadership and teamwork.

19.3 Policy context

Start Strong for Long Day Care program delivers on the Preschool Reform Agreement and preschool fee-relief initiatives.

In December 2021, NSW became the first signatory to the **Preschool Reform Agreement (2022-2025)**, which commits Australian Government funding for early childhood education until the end of 2025. The Agreement is focused on children in the year before school, supporting universal access to early childhood education, regardless of service setting.

The Agreement is significant for NSW and the early childhood education sector, providing four years of funding certainty while supporting increased participation and quality.

The Agreement will also support important reforms for the preschool sector, including boosting enrolment, attendance, and trialling new outcomes measures for preschool. The department will work closely with the sector and provide further information on this as it becomes available. Funding rates for Start Strong for Long Day Care are subject to the National Preschool Reform Agreement being finalised by the Australian Government for 2026.

The target group for 4YO+ Program Payment and 4YO+ Fee Relief Payment funding is children who are at least 4 years old on, or before, 31 July 2026 and attending an early childhood education program in a long day care setting.

The NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund (the Fund) is being used to trial the provision of fee relief to 3-year-old children attending eligible preschool programs in long day care centres, effective from 1 January 2024. The fee relief funding for 2026 will be delivered through the 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program.

The target group for the 3YO Fee Relief Trial Payment funded by the Fund is eligible 3-year-old children attending an eligible early childhood education program in a long day care setting.

This program is being delivered on a test and trial basis.

Start Strong for Long Day Care is committed to supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. The department's **First Steps Strategy** is a commitment to improving access to quality early childhood education for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in NSW. Start Strong supports the goals of the First Steps Strategy by:

- supporting the attendance and engagement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood education to enhance outcomes. This includes ensuring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children are fully supported to attend a minimum of 600 hours of early childhood education in the year before school in all service types
- ensuring funding models in NSW are best placed to enable quality participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- supporting services to deliver a culturally appropriate transition into early childhood education and primary school programs for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children
- ensuring early childhood education services have strong relationships with their local communities.

20. Review and evaluation

The 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care program guidelines may be updated or amended at any time. This will be in response to continuous program improvement or where further clarity is required. Changes to the program guidelines may be made in consultation with the sector but remain at the discretion of the department. Any changes will be communicated to the sector.

An evaluation will be undertaken by the department to understand the effectiveness of Start Strong program funding and fee relief in achieving the program outcomes. Providers will be required to participate in evaluation/s of the program through:

- the provision of data, which may include and is not limited to, attendance, absences, child demographic information etc,
- completion of financial accountability statements,
- provision of expenditure records and
- participation in other evaluation activities.

Monitoring the overall performance of Start Strong means the department can determine whether the program is appropriately targeted, if program outputs and outcomes are being achieved, and ensures that any work with providers to enhance early childhood education programs aligns with high quality expectations outlined under the **National Quality Framework (NQF).**

21. Glossary of terms

Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+)

Remoteness Areas are derived from the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (ARIA+) produced by the University of Adelaide.

Remoteness Areas divide Australia into 5 classes of remoteness based on a measure of relative access to services. The 5 remoteness classes are:

- Major Cities
- Inner Regional
- Outer Regional
- Remote

- Very Remote.

Children eligible for maximum funding

A child is eligible for maximum funding if one of the following criteria is met:

1. All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, or
2. Children that attend a service:

- located in an Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote region in NSW based on 2021 Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) produced by the University of Adelaide (Australian Centre for Housing Research) and used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, or
- located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 or 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021, or
- operated by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

Compulsory schooling

The *Education Act 1990* establishes a compulsory schooling obligation upon parents to ensure children of compulsory school age are enrolled and in attendance at a school.

A child is of compulsory school-age where they are of or above the age of 6 years and below the minimum school leaving age as defined by section 21B of the Education Act.

Equity Enrolment

Equity Enrolments are:

1. All Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children; or
2. Children that attend a service located in a geographic area (Statistical Area Level 2) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Decile of 1 or 2 (ranking within NSW) on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage 2021.

For-profit provider

A for-profit provider is an organisation or entity that operates an early childhood education and care service that aims to generate profit for its owners or shareholders.

GST exclusive amounts

The funding rates outlined in the guidelines do not include GST. If the provider is GST registered, it will receive funding payments that include GST. If the provider is not GST registered, it will receive payments that do not include GST.

Levies

Levies are additional charges that a service may apply to families on top of regular daily fees. These levies typically cover extras like materials or administrative costs. Levies must be justifiable and services need to retain evidence of the reasons behind them for compliance reviews. Voluntary payments or optional extras such as families choosing to pay for a music lesson or extracurricular activity not required for enrolment are not a levy.

Not-for-profit provider

A not-for-profit provider is an organisation or entity that operates an early childhood education and care service without generating a profit for owners or shareholders. All profit is reinvested into the service, resources and facilities.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is a product that enables the assessment of the welfare of Australian communities. The indexes are produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

What are deciles?

Area-based deciles are calculated by dividing the areas, ordered by disadvantage, into 10 equally sized groups. Decile 1 contains the top 10% most disadvantaged areas. The department has elected to use deciles based on ranking of socio-economic disadvantage within NSW only. Area-based deciles are easy to interpret as SEIFA is designed and constructed as an area-based measure.

What are Statistical Areas Level 2 (SA2s)?

The ABS developed the Main Structure of the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) which is used to release and analyse social, demographic and economic statistics within a functional geographic area.

The structure has seven hierarchical levels, one which includes 'Statistical Areas Level 2' (SA2s). SA2s are medium-sized areas that represent a community that interacts together socially and economically.

22. More information, resources and contact details

A range of resources are available to support providers in implementing the requirements under the Start Strong for Long Day Care program. A link to the Frequently Asked Questions is below.

Frequently Asked Questions– 2026 Start Strong for Long Day Care

Our Frequently Asked Questions can be found **here**, containing easy to read answers to questions relating to providers and services. Topics include Fee Relief, declaration and consent forms, service eligibility, spending rules, calculation, and payments.

More information about the National Quality Standards and Quality Areas

More information is available at:

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)

More information about the Early Childhood Contract Management System (ECCMS)

More information is available at:

ECCMS frequently asked questions

More information about myID and Relationship Authorisation Manager

Information on myID and Relationship Authorisation Manager is available on the:

my website

Relationship Authorisation Manager website

Having trouble with myID and RAM?

Support for myID and RAM is provided by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). Find support for:

creating and using myID

using RAM, including importing existing AUSkey users

More information about Childcare Care Subsidy (CCS) for approved providers

CCS helpdesk telephone: 1300 667 276

CCS helpdesk email: ccshelpdesk@dese.gov.au

Contact details

For questions, feedback, complaints, or access to information about Start Strong, please contact the department by:

Calling 1800 619 113 (toll free)

Emailing ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au

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